

# JEEVADHARA

*A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION*



## INVOLVEMENT WITH HISTORY

### MODELS OF HISTORY

*Samuel Rayan*

### CHURCH AND HISTORY IN THE MAKING

*Ignatius Puthiadam*

### THE DIALECTIC OF HISTORY

*S. Kappen*

### THROUGH HISTORY TO HERMENEUTICS :

### A NEW PERSPECTIVE IN THEOLOGY

*George Therukattil*

# *Jeevadhara*

is published in English and Malayalam

## **GENERAL EDITOR**

J. C. Manalel

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Abraham Koothottil – Thomas Vellilamthadam

*The Problem of Man*

J. M. Pathrapankal – George Kaniarakam

*The Word of God*

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Theology Centre  
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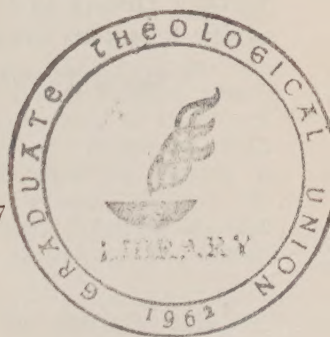
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No. 73-78  
1983

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# Editorial

In the recent philosophical and theological thinking, the consciousness of history plays a significant role. The contemporary awareness of man's precariousness in time on the one hand and of his freedom and the consequent responsibility on the other could be at the basis of modern man's concern with history. Taking time and history seriously also points to a new understanding of reality and of our place and role in it in terms of the creative possibilities of our existence. In this sense history is not understood simply as a series of past events where the human being is just an onlooker but as a process of man's making or unmaking of himself in his dynamic relationship with the givenness in which he finds himself.

In this, time and history are understood basically as a linear and irreversible process. However, there are also other models of history with which people have lived and still live meaningfully which also need to be taken into account if contemporary thought has to overcome its provincialism as it associates itself with the category of history.

Thus, our study of history in this issue of *Jeevadhara* begins with an exposition of the diverse models and modalities of history, and on the basis of the insights gained therefrom, Samuel Rayan raises a question to the claim of Christian thinkers that only the linear model of history is compatible with the Christian faith and Christian understanding of reality. Rayan's contention is that the cyclic model of history for example "does not seem to be quite so primitive and meaningless nor so very incompatible with Christian faith and thought as it is often made out to be", and that in order to account for the Christian experience of faith and the promise of possibilities implied therein what we need is "a multi-dialectical conception of time and history which perhaps is yet to be worked out". However, with respect to history, the real problem according to Rayan is "whether we are prepared to make history and prevent its actual unmaking". And who makes history? Rayan's answer: "History will be made by the people who wake up to reality and struggle for freedom and justice."

Ignatius Puthiadam briefly narrates the story of Christianity's involvement with history and attempts to see how much Christianity has contributed to the making of history or caused its unmaking. The potential it had from Jesus' message and the apostolic community's life-witness for building up a genuine human history not only remained fruitless, but began to be counter-productive from the time of its political triumph in the Roman empire. If history is born in freedom, when Christianity

on account of its claim to absolute truth and superiority began to deny the freedom of conscience and force its faith upon men and women, as it happened in the Roman empire of Constantine and his successors, in the kingdom of Charlemagne and in the colonies of Christian Europe, it was destroying culture and un-making history. Puthiadam points out that this seems to be repeated at times today in a more subtle way in some of the missionary efforts of the Church, and even in its ways of exercising authority and demanding obedience. Yet he finds room for hope in the recent self-understanding of the Church as the pilgrim people of God.

Sebastian Kappen presents and critically evaluates Marx's view of history which is "the most serious attempt made so far to understand the complexity of the historical process". For Marx, the course of history is determined by dialectical movements and interrelations involving the human being, which does not take away man's conscious role in the whole process. Thus to understand properly Marx's view of history, one has "to maintain the unity in tension between the objective dialectic of structures and the subjective dialectic of human praxis". Man, therefore is the maker of history, not alone by himself, but in his interaction with the given structures. And the immanent goal of history in Marxian perspective is a new society without alienations.

In the concluding article of this study on history, George Therukattil brings up some of the important implications of the growing awareness of historical dimension of man. Since the human being is a participant in history which is ambivalent and ambiguous, the knowledge he attains in the midst of the historical process, whether scientific, philosophical or theological can never be so absolute and objective as once the claim was. Theologizing in this awareness would have a different quality and need to use a new method which he calls the historico-hermeneutic method. He points out also how such concerns of the church today as inculturation, and the problems regarding the function of magisterium in theology could be better dealt with by this method.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* in its making has also shared in the ambivalence of history. The original plan contained two more studies, one on "The Historical and the Mythical" and another on "The Cosmic and the Historical".



# Models of History

## I. History and the christian faith

The claim that the christian faith is historical is old, and by now quite commonplace. What does the claim mean? It means that the stories which base and express the core of the faith are, in essentials, events and not myths. (Myths are stories handed down from olden times to explain natural phenomena or the origin of the world, of things, customs, tribes etc.) Some christians hold that the historical character of their faith includes the possibility of dating some of the events, at least in relation to other known facts and personalities of (secular) history. Such, it is pointed out, is the case of Jesus who was born in the reign of the roman emperor Tiberius Caesar and was killed under the governor Pontius Pilate. But much more is in question than the possibility of dating faith-events. Dates and chronologies are by no means a biblical concern. The interest of the Bible centres on witness to God and to faith-responses, on a faith-interpretation of history, a theology of history.

Christian faith is historical because divine *revelation*, to which faith is the response of people, is made *in* history and *as* history. History may be described as a succession of personal events which are irreversible, and unforeseeable, taken together; it is the totality of human experiences provoked by geographical, social and political realities<sup>1</sup>. In the exodus event, for example, people act and create a new situation of freedom and in that process perceive the self-disclosure and activity of Yahweh as the liberator of the oppressed. In their subsequent history of over a thousand years the hebrew people discern the presence of God revealing himself as judge and saviour. The prophets of Israel hear the word of God in historical situations and events, and speak from within them and in terms of them. And what

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1) Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History. The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959) pp. 75, 95, 119. We are very much indebted to this classic for our exposition of two approaches to history.

they have to say is not a metaphysics of the Absolute, but Yahweh's historical judgements and demands in the given time and place. The individual history of the man Jesus is held by christians to constitute God's definitive revelation and self-gift. That history impinged on Israel's national history and on the history of the roman empire in remarkably conflictual and liberating ways.

*Salvation* too is, like revelation, bound up with history. Christians do not understand salvation as deliverance from history and from the conditions of space and time. They think rather of the salvation of history itself, and of the salvation of the totality of personal and positive human experiences, and of the world and the cosmos, and not only of the salvation of souls or even of individual persons. The hope of bodily resurrection and a general judgement, the practice of the sacramental system, and the organisation of faith-life into church communities or a communion of saints are some of the symbols of this view of salvation. But we must add at once that a different viewpoint has also existed within the christian tradition. The apocalyptic outlook envisages the destruction of this world as it is too wicked for redemption, and hopes for a new creation in which good people alone will be raised to blessed life. Here we meet with two different christian estimates of history. Salvation is also seen as a reality *present in history*: the Messiah has come, the Kingdom has arrived, and God is already with us. The Eschaton is now though its completion may lie in the future, but that is secondary. In this view history is awarded incomparable spiritual value and high religious status. There are christians, however, who disagree with this outlook. They see history as a place of testing and of preparation for salvation which for them lies in the *future*, outside and beyond history and its processes. There are also those who see salvation as history, as a finer and truly human history, a history liberated from alienations of every kind, and yet continuing to be made and to unfold, always arriving and always setting out, moving ever deeper into the mystery of God and his creation, daily discovering new gardens in his heart and in ours. But to others this idea of salvation is unacceptable. Salvation may begin here as conversion and grace, but it still remains precarious and ambiguous till history comes to an end

and the security of changeless happiness begins *beyond* history. Now we are only saved in hope.

It is clear, then, that the faith has to do with history. But it is also clear that no complete agreement exists as to the nature of their relationship. That means that among christians there are different tendencies in the understanding and the valuation of history.

## 2. Models of history

There exist, in fact, more than one mental picture of time and history. Three main models may be distinguished: the cyclic, the linear and the spiral or the dialectical.

### A. Cyclic model

The cyclic concept of time and history is said to be characteristic of archaic men, pre-modern generations, primitive cultures, oriental peoples, agricultural civilizations and the popular masses in general. It is the way the world-process is seen not only in ancient times but even today by all but an elite minority<sup>2</sup>. Time and history are experienced and represented as periodic and repetitive and moving cyclically. The concept has its basis in the obvious rhythm of the cosmos and of living things. The endless succession and alternation of sunrise and sunset, winter and summer, the phases of the moon, childhood and manhood, seed and tree, day and night illustrate the cycle of nature. There is a periodic regeneration of life which points to a periodic regeneration of time. And that, according to Mircea Eliade, means a new creation, a repetition of the cosmogonic act. Cosmogonies, cosmic myths, extrahistorical events and primordial personages become archetypes and models for archaic man. On them he patterns his life, laws, rituals, marriage and all movements and concerns. Thus pre-modern man's life is a "ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others,"<sup>3</sup> The result is the idea of the eternal return, "the cyclic return of what has been before". Eliade concludes that for the archaic man "everything begins over again at its

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2) Eliade, *passim*. This, in fact, is the theme of Eliade's book.

3) *ib.*, pp. 5, 22, 25.



commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final. In a certain sense it is even possible that nothing new happens in the world, for everything is but the repetition of the same primordial archetype".<sup>4</sup>

The following are the salient characteristics of the cyclic view of history. Neither the objects of the external world nor the products of human activity have any intrinsic reality or autonomous validity. History in itself is meaningless. Hence it is periodically abolished, or seen as copy of transhistorical models, or given metahistorical meaning. Things and events derive all their reality and validity from being imitations, participations and repetitions of primordial models and mythical times.<sup>5</sup> Thereby time is abolished. It is brought to a standstill. The moment when any act or any development takes place coincides with the primordial mythical moment. Every move repeats the original move and coincides with it. Real human time and duration are thus suspended, all situations remain stationary, and history is abolished.<sup>6</sup> The contemporary historical moment is seen as situated farther from the primordial model than its preceding historical moment, and therefore as inferior to it. Every succeeding aeon or *yuga* represents decadence. The contemporary moment is systematically devalued. But the count-down of the aeons marks at the same time the approach of regeneration and of the new cycle, the return to the Golden Age. This means that history is transformed into myth and real persons into archetypes. Persons, events, situations are sooner or later shorn of their historical particularities and uniqueness, and identified with categories, models and stereotypes. Cyclic thinking evinces a marked tendency to annul personal traits, to reduce the personal to the impersonal and to reject creative spontaneity.<sup>7</sup> Nothing that happens in the world – neither the rise and fall of civilizations nor the wars and sufferings of peoples, nor the conquests and social injustices – is arbitrary or contingent. All events and catastrophes are seen as necessary and inevitable. They are caused by the cosmic rhythm, or the constellations or the will of God.

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4) *ib.*, pp. 88–90.

5) *ib.*, pp. 3, 5, 10, 34, 90, 141.

6) *ib.*, pp. 131–132, 117.

7) *ib.*, pp. 37–47.



Archaic man therefore defends himself with all his might "against all the novelty and irreversibility which history entails". Hence the traditional man's "terror of history" which Eliade attempts to analyse. The man of ancient cultures refuses to situate himself in concrete historical time. Why does he do so? Because he is precociously weary? or he is afraid of movement and spontaneity? or terrified by the risk of freedom and the dangers of the historical condition? <sup>8</sup> It would be instructive to observe at this point how nearly all organised religions and churches closely respond, in their attitude to liturgies, dogmas, structures and authority, to this description of the cyclic conception of time.

### B. Linear model

In the linear model of history there is no repeated return of the same world to the same starting point, the mythical event and the archetype. History is conceived as creative advance towards a goal. It is moving towards fulfilment and will someday come to an end. History has a destiny. And time is not reversible, uniform or static; it is structured, dynamic and forward-moving. It is a one-way reality. The past is not abolished, nor is the future conceived in terms of the past. The distinction of time into past, present and future is real. There is a progression of breaks with the past, and that means time is both continuous and discontinuous. Real change is admitted. Novelty is a characteristic of history on the march. Events, therefore, are irreversible. They have meaning and value in themselves, and in relation to each other, and above all in relation to the future and the goal of the totality of history. Time is not infinite, and history has limits.

Eliade points out that "interest in the 'irreversible' and the 'new' in history is a recent discovery in the life of humanity". According to him the Hebrews were the first to make the discovery. It began with Abraham who introduced the category of faith, thus initiating a new religious experience. Faith means freedom from the natural law of cyclic movement: a creative freedom which has God for its source and support. The revelation given to Moses takes place in time, in historical duration,

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8) *ib.*, pp. 48, 141-142, 155.

in a limited moment, which is not reversible. The Hebrew prophets perceived the will of Yahweh in the victories and defeats, the catastrophes and sufferings of their nation. Yahweh chastised the people for not keeping faith with him, but he also promised and worked deliverance, thus orienting the people towards the future and placing them in a trajectory of hope. Out of this experience grew the Messianic expectations. Thus, in Eliade's words, "under the 'pressure of history' and supported by the prophetic and Messianic experience, a new interpretation of events dawns among the people of Israel".<sup>9</sup> Historical events began to be regarded as Yahweh's active presence. History appeared as a series of theophanies. Each theophany, each event, had its intrinsic value because it was Yahweh's intervention with a view to the people's final salvation. It was also a place of personal encounter between Yahweh and the people. In this way Israel came to face history instead of escaping from it and abolishing it through the possibility of repetitions without end. They accepted history "as a terrifying dialogue with Yahweh", and regarded every moment as decisive.<sup>10</sup> This Hebrew discovery of time as a one-way reality and of history as the epiphany of God was taken up and further developed by the christian movement. The early christian writers opposed the concept of cyclic time and astral influences on human destiny. They traced a straight line for humanity's course from the Fall to final Redemption. History came to be seen as possessed of unique meaningfulness because at its heart stood the incomparable event of Jesus Christ.

### C. Spiral model

This unfinished model takes note of the periodicity which appears in human affairs and with which philosophers of history like Spengler and Toynbee concern themselves. It sees cyclic fluctuations and periodic crises in political economy, and corresponding recurrence of war-time and peace-time. Marx, following Hegel, discovers a dialectical movement in history, but unlike Hegel refuses to return to an eternal archetypal Spirit, and resolutely looks forward to an ever more authentic human history. In the dialectical movement that Marx discerns, the

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9) *ib.*, pp 48, 106. cf. 109-111, 160-161

10) *ib.*, pp 104-110

solution of some contradictions generates others at a higher level of reality with wider range and scope. Through successive solutions of such contradictions, through ever sharper conflicts and struggles, through more complete overcoming of alienations, history marches forward to fuller and fuller socialization. The story of socialization is traced from primitive family groups through tribal communities, the slave state, the feudal set-up, capitalism and the bourgeois system to the awakening of the working class to the hoped for socialist interval to the final communist society. Progress occurs not in a straight line but along a spiral of struggles against never and stronger alienating contradictions. As long as alienations last, history is insufficiently authentic; it is called pre-history because of the presence in it of oppression, unfreedom and inequality. But authentic history too is shaping up within human action for the elimination of alienating contradictions which are embodied in the need for profit and exploitation, the need for division of people into classes, and the need for the private appropriation of socially produced wealth. The history which comes to birth through this travail of overcoming alienations is apparently conceived as unending. It will be the final stage of history in which men and women will have unhindered possibility of endless creative advance and personal self-realization as free individuals in an equal community. Marx's idea of the dialectical movement of history is reflected in the following statement. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances already found, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>11</sup> Human beings shape the world and are shaped by it. There is no submission to nature and to the past as in archaic conceptions; nor is there a break with them as in the linear model of history. And the presence of contradictions and alienations are taken seriously. History is a dialectical spiral process of creative advance.

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11) Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) given in Saul K. Padover, *The Essential Marx* (New York: New American Library 1978) pp. 227-228. See also Arthur F. McGovern, *Marxism: An American Christian Perspective* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980) p. 70.

### 3. Further modalities

The three models described above may be modified by one or more of the following ways of looking at history.

a) Some conceptions of history exclude God from its processes. God is transcendent and wholly other. He comes into history as it were from the outside; he breaks into it to judge, grace and save it. But he is not himself affected by the historical process. This, I think, is the position of traditional classical theologies. Others, however, chiefly process theologians, refuse to set up "a super-terrestrial, sheerly supra-natural, being called 'God'". For them 'God is in this world or he is nowhere' (Whitehead). He is Love passionately involved in our history and deeply affected by it. Without detriment to his divine perfection he can change and receive into himself every moment all the good that is in history and thus acquire a 'consequent nature'. God too has a history along with our history and through it<sup>12</sup>. Our history itself is a history which we make with God and he with us, in total partnership. History in this view is different in its throb and quality from history judged and saved by an immutable and wholly other God<sup>13</sup>.

b) Other modifications may result from the inclusion or the exclusion of nature in the conception of history. Linear historicism seems to oppose history to nature. Nature repeats itself, and, as Hegel said, nothing new ever occurs in it while history is marked by novelty. Eliade mentions "modern man's resistance to nature" and his struggle for autonomy<sup>14</sup>. Others, however, refuse to follow "existentialist writers who speak about human history "as if it were being played out against a background of irrelevant natural recurrence".<sup>15</sup> The truth is that we belong to and with our environment; we are organic to nature. Norman Pittenger insists that "we ought not to attempt to separate human experience and history from nature, but rather see that nature itself is historical - by which I mean that it is processive,

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12) Norman Pittenger, *The Last Things in a Process Perspective* ((London: Epworth Press, 1970) pp. 18-23.

13) Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1980) pp. 638-644.

14) Eliade, op. cit., p. 154.

15) Pittenger, op. cit., p. 27.



with movement and change". He stands for a view of history which embraces the whole world process including the realm of nature and the 'decisions' made by it in its evolutionary advance.<sup>16</sup> Marx too emphasises the necessity to resolve the antagonism between man and nature, for nature has human significance and society is "the accomplished union of man with nature".<sup>17</sup>

c) The quality of views on history differs according to the way the end of history is envisaged. Some are quite aware of the fact that we have not seen the end and therefore the nature of the process itself is beyond any secure grasp. We may recall Hegel's observation that as we can know an acorn only when we recognize, through experience in time, its potential to be an oak tree, so we can only understand human nature through the whole of human history.<sup>18</sup> But the whole of history is not there for us to see. All our understanding and interpretations of it are therefore provisional. But history also may be seen as summed up in each individual life and, in fact, in each individual human decision. Each life and each decision bring human processes to a culmination. Marx writes: "The individual is the social being. The manifestation of his life...is, therefore, the manifestation and affirmation of social life. Individual human life and species-life are not different things...In his species-consciousness man confirms his real social life, and reproduces his real existence in thought...Though man is a unique individual...he is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists in reality as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestations of life".<sup>19</sup> We know that this is very specially true of Jesus and his decision to struggle to the end. Since we know something about his goal (the Kingdom of God on earth) and about the conclusion of his life (death-resurrection), we are in a position to surmise something about the end and the nature of history as a whole.

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16) *ib.*, pp. 26-27.

17) Marx, *Early Writings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) pp. 155-156.

18) G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1821), referred to in McGovern, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

19) Marx, *Early Writings*, pp. 155-156.

d) The shape of history seen from above may differ from its features looked at from below. History can be seen from above through the eyes, experiences and interests of the ruling group in state and church. A different picture is sure to emerge when history is seen from below through the eyes, experiences and hopes of the oppressed and the poor. The shape of history, its total thrust and goal, the forces in it recognized as creative and meaningful, and the interpretations of its processes will not be the same in both cases. In his well-researched book, *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn writes: "The treatment of heroes (Columbus) and their victims (the Arawaks)- the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress - is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, in which the past is told from the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders". Zinn cites the example of Henry Kissinger who defines history as "the memory of states" and proceeds to tell "the history of nineteenth-century Europe from the viewpoint of the leaders of Austria and England, ignoring the millions who suffered from these statesmen's policies".<sup>20</sup> Toynbee recalls how in 1897 many people assumed that history was synonymous "with the alarms and excursions of the western civilization's turbulent past... History consisted, so it then seemed, of those particular past events that had led up to the west's present ascendancy. Other past events were irrelevant to history, and they could be ignored". Thus the picture then presented had excluded from history the history of Japan before 1868, of China before 1839, of India before 1746, of Russia before 1694, and the whole history of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam; and the Jews were excluded from A.D. 70, and the Greeks from A.D. 451. But "by 1973 it had become manifest that none of the enormous mass of jettisoned history could be written off any longer as being irrelevant".<sup>21</sup> By 1973 an integral survey of history had become imperative because the suppressed nations, peoples and cultures had rebelled and at least partially shaken off western domination

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20) Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper, 1980) p. 9; cf. pp. 7-11 on the writing of history.

21) Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth. A Narrative History of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) pp. vii-x.

and taken back their power to be authors of their own history. As a consequence, "the selection of historical events that had seemed plausible in 1897 looked grotesque already in 1973".<sup>22</sup> The lesson is that the role played by social position and class interest in the understanding and portrayal of history must not be overlooked in any theological enterprise, or presentation of the faith.

(e) The understanding of history will also undergo modification according to different views taken of the subject of history. Is the subject of history the individual person, or is it the social and collective reality of the dispossessed people as a whole? Those who opt for the first alternative emphasize personal conversion and "argue that society will change as people, individually, become more mature, more generous, and more creative". Others, opting for the second alternative and basing themselves on the experience of third world struggles, argue that people grow in maturity and creativity "as they involve themselves in the social struggle to change the structures of society". They point out that the psychic wounds and personal break-down and ego-centred anxiety of millions of people which keep them from social involvement have social causes. These are as a rule the product of prolonged marginalisation, malnutrition, indignity and suffering, of the economic system, the advertising industry and the consumer mentality. What counts in situations of grave injustice and oppression is not personal growth but solidarity with others and joint struggle to change the existing system. "It is precisely this collective engagement", says Gregory Baum, "that delivers people from their fears, their passivity, their self-contempt and other psychic burdens that oppression has inflicted on them", and enables them to be subjects of their history, to assume responsibility for their own lives.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Faith, theology and patterns of history

Such are the main models of history with which people work with or without being fully aware of their shape and implications. One or another of them, or a combination of some

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22) *ib.*, p. x.

23) Gregory Baum, *Theology Questions Psychiatry: An Address in The Ecumenist* vol. 20, no. 4 (May-June) 1982, pp. 56-59.

of them is surely part of everybody's outlook and mental equipment. But it is the claim of christian thinkers that not every model of history but only the linear one is compatible with the christian faith and the christian understanding of reality. The faith implies, calls for and gives birth to a linear conception of time. It rejects or corrects and transforms all repetitive and cyclic models. This, it is claimed, is what the faith has done for Europe. The technological and economic progress of Europe is not unrelated to this vision of history. On the other hand the stagnation and underdevelopment of the ancient societies of Asia, Africa and America must be attributed in large measure, we are told, to their cyclic conception of time.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, then, both theological and social progress demands that archaic societies give up their older patterns of thought and adopt the linear view of history characteristic of the christian west. For "christianity is the "religion" of modern man and historical man, of the man who simultaneously discovered personal freedom and continuous time (in place of cyclic time)".<sup>25</sup> This claim, however, calls for a number of observations and critical questions.

(i) Eliade's study shows that the linear idea of history has never been universally and effectively accepted by people. To our day, it has failed to reach the masses. History as creative advance has remained the vision of an elite minority. Even after the discovery of one-way time, the Hebrew people as a whole continued to retain the archaic conceptions, while messianic ideas were the "exclusive creation of a religious elite".<sup>26</sup> Even among christians the great majority "continue, down to our day to preserve themselves from history by ignoring it and by tolerating it rather than by giving it the meaning... of a theophany". Eliade's conclusion is that "the christianity of the popular european strata never succeeded in abolishing either the theory of the archetype... or the cyclical and astral theories".<sup>27</sup> If this is so, one must question either the thesis of incompatibility of cyclic conceptions with Judaeo-christian faith, or question the

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24) See, for instance, Piero Gheddo, *Why is the Third World Poor?* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973) pp. 32-33, 36-37.

25) Eliade, *ib.*, pp. 161-162.

26) *ib.*, pp. 104, 107, 119.

27) *ib.*, p. 142.



authenticity of the faith of European people. But if the faith of the people of Europe down the centuries has in substance remained authentic, is not a similar faith possible for Asians and Africans within their own traditional cultures and their own "archaic" and "primitive" conceptions of time?

(ii) Even among the elite there has been no agreement as to the model of history that the faith requires and creates. Eliade bears witness to the fact that early Christian writers were divided on the issue. Irenaeus of Lyons, Saint Basil, Saint Gregory and Saint Augustine and, in the middle ages, Joachim of Floris saw history as linear while Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, Arnobius and Theodoret accepted theories of cycles and astral influences. Even the thought of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon and Dante were not free of cyclic conceptions. It is a noteworthy fact, then, that for over a thousand years Christian theology framed itself within Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophies which were basically philosophies of changeless permanence and eternal return.<sup>28</sup> Jose Miranda is emphatic that the Platonic philosophy of ideas "was invented to strip time of all its importance: history and the future were reduced to mere applications of universal essences... For long and unhappy centuries "Christian" theologians believed that the idea of eternal return could be separated from the rest of Greek philosophy... The Platonic world of ideas... was a way of assuring that the human mind reduced history to an eternal return. Christian theology adopted the Platonic world of ideas, stuffing into it other equally nontemporal notions. As a result, theology abandoned the history of real people to its wretched luck".<sup>29</sup>

(iii) Modern times, described as the time of historical man who makes himself, have witnessed among the elite themselves a nostalgia for the cyclic. The beginning of this century saw a reaction against historical linearism, and a revival of interest in the theory of cycles. Miranda cites the anthropologist and poet Octavio Paz for whom "the eternal return is one of the implicit

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28) *ib.*, pp. 132, 120-122, 34-38.

29) Jose Miranda, *Being and the Messiah. The Message of Saint John* (New York: Orbis Books, 1977) p. 68.

assumptions of almost every revolutionary theory". He also refers to the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes's, "nostalgia for paradise lost".<sup>30</sup> As noted earlier, ideas of periodic oscillations are recognized in political economy, and philosophers of history study the problem of periodicity in history. Nietzsche has revived the myth of the eternal return. The work of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce "is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and... for the abolition of time".<sup>31</sup> Is not this reaction and the failure of historical linearism to find wider acceptance a pointer to some deficiency in the concept itself? Is it really possible for man to make himself in total isolation from the cyclic system of the cosmos? Marx has pointed out that when "the relation of man to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created", we end by reducing history to "the political actions of princes and states, religious and all sorts of theoretical struggles" instead of attending to the stages of the production of concrete life by successive generations, each of which exploits the productive forces inherited from the past.<sup>32</sup> There are lessons to learn from the vicissitudes of abstract linearism.

(iv) There are lessons to learn also from the fact that religions and churches organise worship in liturgical cycles. Jose Miranda finds in the religious calendar with its recurrent feasts a version of the cycles of the eternal return. He therefore rejects it and would not have the dates of Christ's life reduced to a lubricant for those eternal cycles.<sup>33</sup> Eliade's reference to the liturgy is more nuanced. He finds there "traces of the ancient doctrine of periodic regeneration of history". For him "the Christian liturgical year is based upon a periodic and real repetition of the Nativity, Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus". Here history is abolished and thereby renewed a number of times before the arrival of the final *eschaton*.<sup>34</sup> There is truth in these

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30) *ib.*, pp. 64-67. The reference is to Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 1961, p. 143; and to Carlos Fuentes, *Tiempo Mexicano*, 1971, p. 13.

31) Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 146.

32) Marx and Engels, *the German Ideology* (1846)

(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964) p. 51-65.

33) Miranda, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

34) Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

assertions. Liturgy is seen by officialdom and the rank and file of believers as faithful repetition of archetypal models. The tendency is to make it static and impersonal, and severely to exclude spontaneity and creativity except, perhaps, rarely, at its fringes. The worship system has surely played a part in creating an a-historical or anti-historical attitude among the faithful. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that repetitive prayer and ritual are the path the worshipper often treads in his pilgrimage not to the past but to the present Lord who has acted and continue to act to enable people to walk out of the prison of the past through an experience of forgiveness, to surpass themselves in love for others and to move into the future of God's promises. The traditional theology of the Eucharist is a case in point. There is a medieval prayer (*O Sacrum Convivium*) which understands the Eucharist in terms of the three dimensions of time. In the Eucharist the death of Jesus is recalled as a once-for-all historical event, that is, as a fact of the past, but a past fact which is celebrated now as active and alive in its meaning and power within present history, summoning us assuringly to strive for the new, resurrected, fraternal world of the future. Not every repetition and re-presentation means eternal return; they need not mean return at all.

(v) In fact, the cyclic does not seem to be quite so primitive and meaningless nor so very incompatible with christian faith and thought as it is often made out to be. Nor is it necessarily an endeavour to abolish history. It is often a way of living in history which includes nature, and of relating-to-nature which constitutes the history-making process. We belong with nature and the cosmos, and our existence is bound up with its rhythm. To pretend otherwise would be unrealistic and unwise. We grow and mature through nature's cycles, and time grows and matures with us as we sleep and wake, work and rest, eat and celebrate again and again, sing the same songs and repeat the same words of love. We move forward on nature's cycles and reach the hour of opportunity and the moment of decision. We cycle to distant destinations. At the basis of our entire technological civilization lies the cyclic motions of the wheel, that archaic invention utterly inseparable from "primitive" experience of reality and time. Every repetition of the Eucharist is meant to carry human commitment further forward and bring it to higher levels within wider

horizons. Every celebration is intended to be a fresh creation of meaning, a new structuring of time and an intenser historicization of the Kingdom which has arrived. Even the most linearist historical man performs repetitive gestures like breathing and walking, and returns home periodically, and harks back to promises made, treaties signed, and treasured memories; and the most modern men hold periodic elections for parliament and presidency. Our own myth of the eternal return!

(vi) Archaic primitive cultures other than the hebrew-christian one, which are said to resist and abolish history by escape into endless cyclic time, have nonetheless been inventive and innovative, changeful and progressive when they were not subjected to oppression. It is not to "modern man" that we owe the invention of fire or the wheel or food grain or agriculture, or city life, or the idea of tools, or language, or the art of writing, weaving, cooking, domesticating animals, building houses, and a thousand other things which make up the basic fabric of human life. The stories Eliade tells do reveal a cyclic understanding of time, but it is arguable whether they imply a rejection of history or a will to abolish it or an act of return to a still point of mythical time. The experience of the tellers of these stories and the performers of these rites were in all likelihood far more complex than can be described in the vocabulary of the linear and the circular.

(vii) It is to be further noted that the category of faith has also come to birth and has continued to influence life within cultures with cyclic conception of time. The Hindu idea of the word, of listening to the word, of faith, and of action, developed within such a culture without any feeling of incongruity deserves closer scrutiny. There are major Hindu traditions which envision a definitive eschaton for individual persons and finally for the cosmos. Texts like the Gita are emphatic that those who have reached the Lord return never more to the cycle of *samsāra*. It seems clear then that any new cosmos or *kalpa* that comes into existence can only be a new creation and not a mere repetition of the old. Since not all the same persons are there the network of relationships within it cannot be the same. The totality, therefore, and its processes are different. And to my knowledge there is nothing in the christian faith which precludes the divine possibility of another cosmos with other people and a different



history when this present cosmos and history have been fulfilled and taken into God.<sup>35</sup>

It therefore remains yet to be shown conclusively in the west or in the east, in ancient traditions or in more modern positions, that the christian faith and its (theological) interpretations are necessarily bound up with any one conception of history, which is to say with any one particular culture and experience of reality. Practically any culture could be of service, and surely all cultures will have to be confronted with critical questions arising from the Gospel. The christian faith affirms the past, the present and the future, all three of them. The meaning of the past is alive in the real presence of the Risen Lord, and its meaninglessness is healed in a present experience of forgiveness. There is no return to the past, and yet there is a return to it to carry it forward into the living present in the celebration of its memory and in thanksgiving. Time is not atomised and fragmented. The present is always flowing into the past and the future into the present; but there is also a way in which the past flows into the present and into the future at the deeper levels of meaning and consequences. The future remains a future which is incessantly coming into the present to transform it into a fuller and finer tomorrow. The future is the Eschaton, the Kingdom of God and the Messiah. The Messiah has come, the Kingdom has arrived, the Eschaton is now. Those who believe and love have passed from death to life. In such a conception of reality neither linear nor cyclic models of history can prove helpful. We need a multi-dialectical conception of time and history which perhaps is yet to be worked out<sup>36</sup>

## 5. The making and the unmaking of history

But the real problem is not how we picture time and history to ourselves. Nor how to interpret repetition of ritual, reference to the past, and symbolic return to origins, or actual

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35) For a fuller treatment of some of these points see S. Rayan, *Indian Theology and the Problem of History* in Richard W. Taylor, *Society and Religion* (Madras: C.I.S., 1976) pp. 171-179

36) See a brief discussion on this in S Rayan ib., pp. 179-191.

and affective return to mothers. The real problem is whether we are prepared to make history and prevent its actual un-making. When we are committed to and involved in the making and upbuilding of history, we shall come to know history's true shape and face, and we shall know its real enemies and their way of effectively abolishing it. For history does not just happen by the passing of time. Linear time is *mechanical time*; it marks the movement of things and is measured by the tick of circular movements inside a chronometer, or by the relative positions of rotating and revolving stars and planets. By itself such time is not history. Different from it is *human time* which is time as experienced by us. An hour by the clock is short when the heart experiences happiness and ecstasy; it is long when the heart's experience is pain and anxiety. The time of crisis and the time of hope have a quality, a vibrancy, a depth different from those of the hours of daily routine. All such moments of experience with human meaning belong within the texture of history. Different from these still is the hour of decision-making, of commitment to painful struggle for a cause or for others, of selfless sacrificial love, of fellowship and solidarity. Here mechanical time is taken into the depths of human existence, of the human heart. It is humanised, historicized and given new content and meaning. Here time begins to be purposeful and forward-looking. Time begins to have a face. It is in and with such moments and actions that history is made. We make history; we make the world and its future; and thereby we make ourselves. History is made not by falling out of the cosmos, or abandoning "the paradise of archetypes and repetition"<sup>37</sup>, but by moving deeper into the reality and the life embedded in the promise which the cosmos and time and ourselves are. Different yet from these are the times when the other person meets us, speaks to us, names us, offers us friendship and invites and challenges us to adequate response. Such times are *kairoi*, and each *kairos* is unique and fraught with possibilities. When the other coming to meet us is given a response, when the proffered hand is taken and we become partners in life's project, history is made at levels profoundly authentic and human. History is a matter of relationships which we build and cultivate

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37) Eliad op, cit., p. 162.

and embody in matter-based action and organisation. Its content and quality are determined by the kind of relationship we create, by the love and commitment we bring to it or fail to bring, and by the way these are realized in bodily, earthly, material fashion. But when the other who meets us with word and challenge is God, time acquires new vibrancy and incomparable depth of meaning. Its dimensions as salvation history now throb with new light and promise as well as with fresh danger and risk.

God encounters us in the earth and the totality of the cosmos and in ourselves. He makes history by creating a cosmos which keeps walking up to him in evolutionary response to the initial fillip he gave it and to the never-failing beckoning of his love. His history-making action takes a new turn and reaches new depths with the emergence of the human and the gift of reflexive consciousness and freedom which constitutes us responseable and co-responsible. The profoundest levels of that action are touched in his intervention in favor of the enslaved and the oppressed, and on behalf of justice, freedom, equality and brotherhood. This action runs through the entire tissue of history and comes to personal culmination and expression in Jesus Christ.

That means God makes history with us and we make it with him wherever freedom and dignity are upheld, promoted, fought for and won back. Wherever injustice is denounced, oppression resisted, and movements set afoot for the dismantling of traditions and structures of exploitation, history is made by people and God in partnership. Action to bring good news to the poor and liberty to captives; action to restore to the dispossessed masses their land and their power over their own future; action to end imperialism of everykind and to liberate people from political, economic and cultural colonialism; and action to set the downtrodden free and build a new social order in which justice shall dwell: such action constitutes history, and makes it salvation history. It transforms our alienated past into a meaningful struggle now which is big with the promise of a human future.

The making of history and its progress are, therefore, to be understood not in geometrical terms of the linear and the circular, but in ethical and spiritual terms of the coming of the Kingdom on our earth and the abundance of its justice among

the people. As Jose Miranda argues, reality is not understood except in terms of time. "Meaningfulness arises from temporality". Time is the condition of authentic existence. But not just any time; it is future time that constitutes the condition of existence. Miranda agrees with Sartre that "it is only when we can conceive a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our sufferings and that we *decide* that these are unbearable".<sup>38</sup> The future is present as a demand for decision to change the present civilization of injustice. That future, the Eschaton, must be made by us. But again, not any future, but the Messianic future is the condition for decision in favor of authentic existence.<sup>39</sup> The Messianic future is that in which the poor have good news and fresh hope announced to them; in which prisoners have liberty and the downtrodden are set free; in which the lame walk, the hungry can feed themselves, and outcasts can come in and take their rightful place in dignity and freedom. It is decisions made in terms of this Messianic future, to make that future a reality of the earth here and now, that define and shape history. The sense of history operative in a people or a culture is to be measured not by their "resistance to nature" or their distance from the cosmos, but by their contribution to the Messianic time, to the Eschaton which has arrived and is demanding to become our history through our decision to struggle for a new, just, human social order.

"Absolute emancipation from any kind of natural 'law'" and "freedom to intervene even in the ontological constitution of the universe" is not the "pre-eminently creative freedom" which shapes history and makes us more human<sup>40</sup>. Plunder and pollution of nature in order to pander to an anarchic production system geared to competitive profit-making and vulgar consumerism are acts which unmake history and retard human progress. History is unmade by oppression and injustice and the violation of the rights of men and women and the suppression of their human potential. The history of Asia, Africa and the Americas was unmade and destroyed by conquests and aggression

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38) J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Citadel, 1968) p. 78.

39) See Miranda op. cit., pp. 49-52.

40) Eliade, op. cit., 160-161.



from the west, by enslavement of peoples, by genocide, racism and apartheid. Colonialism, old and new, has dehistoricized societies by killing their autonomy and freedom of decision, by undermining their self-image and their rhythm of growth, and by overpowering and repressing their cultures. But long before that the history of the people had been destroyed or hampered by mechanisms of caste oppression, feudal exploitation and religious mystification. In Europe too the people had been repressed and their history destroyed. Their dehistoricization went hand in hand with the reduction of the historical Jesus to a shadow.

In such situations who will make history? Who will remake it and define it? Not the conquerors and the killers, not the money-lenders and masters of bonded labour, not the ruling classes and the high castes. Nor will the people make history as long as they accept their chains and forget their power and their vocation to rebel and to fight. History will be made by the people who wake up to reality and struggle for freedom and justice. What history we have alongside or within our long non-history has been made by the oppressed masses through struggle against slavery and exploitation, at great cost to themselves in terms of blood and life. It is within the struggle of the people of South Africa against apartheid and terrorism, in the struggle of the Dalits of our land against untouchability and slavery, in the struggle of the poor against unemployment, landlessness and feudal-capitalism, in the struggle of the people of El Salvador and Guatemala for liberty and against oppression, and in the movements of the people from below that history is being made at this moment. There are defeats and victories in the process, and reversals and hopes; there are times of celebrations and of mourning. Is the process linear or cyclic? Are there repetitions and returns to beginnings? The geometrical vocabulary of linear and circular, of vertical and horizontal in theology and in life can be a diversionary tactic to distract us from the tasks of the moment and the demands of the Eschaton which has arrived and which we must make arrive.

The Bible traces the advance of history in terms of justice and freedom through concrete struggles. But it is possible to

dehistoricize the Bible and reduce its historical message to general spiritual principles with no teeth to bite into the hard realities of earthly existence. It has been possible to dehistoricize and eternalize Christ. In fact we have been given, in Miranda's words "a Christ who was very much God, as much as possible.... The historical Jesus was reduced to an irrelevant incident... What mattered were the eternal truths... Orthodox theology does not deny the historical humanity of Christ...; it simply disregards it. Orthodox theology is concerned with Christ's eternal 'human nature', but not with the contingent event of Christ in the world, nor with the fact that Christ belongs totally to history".<sup>41</sup> We cannot concentrate on the nontemporal and the celestial, not even on the nontemporal and celestial Christ. We have to take the "now" of Jesus seriously. 'This "now" is the historical Jesus'. The Messiah has come. 'This "now" is the hour of justice and life come into history. It is a summons to transform the earth and make authentic human history happen'.<sup>42</sup>

One more quote from Miranda which sums up what we have been trying to say. "Time is ethical, and it can be known only in an ethical resolution. History is made of the outcry of all the oppressed; in it it consists".<sup>43</sup>

Delhi

Samuel Rayan

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41) Miranda, op. cit., p. 83.

42) ib., 199-200.

43) ib., p. 56.

# Church and History in the Making

## (1) Introductory Reflections

It is dangerous to make general and absolute statements on the Church. Some have for example called the Church the virgin bride of Christ. Others have called her a whore. Some have extolled the virtues of the Church. Others have found her the very incarnation of evil. Some consider her the living embodiment of the Gospel. Others think that her life and activity are quite contrary to the message of Jesus Christ. There are persons who think that the Church is the freest society in the world and that she is the champion and bastion of human freedom. There are others who think that the Church is really a slave society. She might plead for freedom when her interests are threatened; but she allows no freedom to her own children. All these and other general statements one can read in many books.

Any one who knows the Church and her history intimately finds the above statements generalised and exaggerated half-truths. To write about the Church, about her involvement with history regarding her contribution to human progress and to man's and society's growth in freedom is not easy. Prejudice can distort facts. Downright condemnation or praise can vitiate one's efforts. I am really conscious of this danger threatening every step I take. Still truth as one sees it after study, reflection and discussion demands public expression and discussions. This love of truth which alone can make us free is the main-spring of this article.

## (2) Culture and Religion

As far back as we can trace our human history, we very clearly notice an intimate relationship between religion and culture. All religions great and small have found their expression in culture. All cultures known to us up to now have had their roots in one or other religion. In our contemporary history some are striving to dissociate culture from its religious roots. The

culture that seems to emerge from such efforts, to say the least, is inhuman. There were and still are religious men who fled or flee from the surrounding culture. They want to lead a pure and cultureless life. But they produce sooner or later sub-cultures. The works of C. Dawson and of A. Toynbee substantiate these statements and hence we need not dwell on them.

Means P.A. says: "Environment ... is not the total causation in culture shaping. It is beyond doubt the most conspicuous single factor. ... but there is still an indefinable factor which may best be designated quite frankly as "X", the unknown quantity, apparently psychological in kind ... If "X" be not the most conspicuous factor in the matter, it certainly is the most important, the most fate laden" (Quoted by A. Toynbee in *A study of History*, Vol. 1, p 83). This "X" is the mythological or religious factor.

When a society gradually changes, shapes a new way of life, moulds a new culture, then too a new religion, or let us say, a new world-view is at work. Certainly both in the genesis and transformation of cultures, such factors as the challenge of the environment, the stimulus of the new countries, the demands of various pressures are at work. But besides these, there is always the mysterious yet real "X" which no fair-minded student can deny.

Since our objective in this paper is to reflect on the Gospel, the Church and their role in the shaping of history and culture, especially from the angle of man's growth in freedom, we need to explain briefly the nature of culture. Religion is a theme that is so often discussed today. So we need not discuss it here.

By culture we refer to the whole activity of man in his ability to control and utilize the environment. When one speaks of culture, one means particularly those powers of men which go beyond the mere ability to survive and which are concerned with the production of things or with activities which are aesthetically pleasing. But the aesthetic and the technical powers of men are ultimately based on a set of values. The values by which a society lives and shapes itself are not merely economic, political or aesthetic. These values are rooted in reli-



gious and moral values. A culture is in this sense a set of values, which forms the basis of its varied activities.

A society which might be the producer of great aesthetic and technical works and yet is unmindful of human dignity, equality and freedom may not be considered really cultured. To say the least it has very fundamental deficiencies. Greek culture was very great in the field of art, philosophy and literature. But these achievements were obtained at the price of enslaving a large number of human beings. India's early culture had attained enviable heights in certain areas like music, architecture, philosophy and so on. But its record in the area of man to man relationship was not perhaps praiseworthy. Perhaps, neither the Greeks nor the Indians were conscious of their deficiencies. Yet we know that the aspirations of millions of men and women for dignity and freedom were thwarted by a set of values accepted and lived by the ruled and the rulers. Religion and morality legitimised certain inhuman practices.

It is not true that every one belonging to a particular society is equally imbued with the prevalent values of that society. It is even possible that individuals rise above the culture of a society and bring about radical changes in the direction of society. A new world view - i.e., a total view of reality (the Absolute, World and Man)-is gradually introduced into it. A new way of thinking and feeling and of even experiencing reality takes possession of a group. It is thus that socio-cultural realities are changed.

As we have already mentioned, religion, society and culture are inter-linked. We also say that "religion" is also at work in the transformation of socio-cultural groups. The influence of religion is often implicit, unobtrusive yet very deep and real. Our purpose here is to trace rapidly the influence exercised by the Gospel and the Church on human culture, especially in the domain of individual and social freedom. What we intend to do is only to highlight certain phases in the history of the Church and reflect on the findings from a theological angle. At the outset I would like to make it clear that history does not show that all religions have always been champions and guarantors of freedom and culture. They can become instruments of oppression and inhumanity.

## PART I

**The Message of Freedom and Love in an Unfree World**

The person of Jesus and his message of freedom has to be understood on the background of Judaism, which in comparison with Christianity or Buddhism was always an ethnic religion. All through their history the Jews found themselves a minority constantly threatened by the surrounding non-jewish masses. At the time of Jesus, the Jews were politically a subject people. Their political glories belonged to the past. Religiously too they were in unfreedom. Prophetism suffered a set-back in post-exilic times and gradually came under clerical control. Judaism as a religion became externalised, temple-centred, rite-oriented and legalistic.

It is into this world that Jesus and the Gospel enter. We know from history that the person, the words and deeds of Jesus made an indelible mark on people. The person and the message of Jesus were centred in God, the Father. Precisely because of this, man and not Laws and observances become the object of his concern and love. Whatever enslaves man, makes man less a son of God, his loving Father, whatever divides and separates man from man is for Jesus contrary to his Father's will and purpose. Jesus' attitude to the "sabbath observances", his familiar contact and converse with the publicans and sinners, his total indifference to the laws of ritual purity, the manner in which he sides with the poor and the oppressed show his genuine love for man and his desire to make him free. Truth makes man free. Love is the goal of freedom. Growth in freedom is achieved through real service. This is the message of Jesus and it is incarnate in him.

In the sermon on the Mount (or in the plains as Luke would say), in his parables and short sayings, above all in his deeds he upsets the accepted values of his society, and of the established and formal religion of his people. Jesus was not certainly a political or social revolutionary in the modern sense of the term. But his experience of God as Father (his father in a very unique sense), merciful, kind, loving, always going in search of the sinner and ever standing by the side of the rejected and the poor is a deeply revolutionary reality. God is the thrice-Holy,

who wants to be worshipped only in spirit and in truth. Men are God's children. The living man and his true growth in God form the guiding principle of all actions. This is the reason why the prophets and above all Jesus reject the tendency to subjugate justice and charity to legal holiness. Jesus did not try to dominate the consciences of people. He appealed to men to see things from God's point of view. Of course he knew what was in man. He did not appeal to laws and rules to establish his message. He just placed before all his experience and the deeds that flow from it. He chose the path of truth and love. He paid for it with his life. The freedom that comes from truth and love leads him to sacrifice his life. This is the will of his Father. Hence the Father raises him from death and makes him *kyrios*'.

We know from the Gospels that the preaching of Jesus attracted crowds. As the Jewish priests said "all the people follow him". In his message, and above all in his person they found the freedom to live and to die in truth and love. Yet if we look at the immediate success of his work, it is not impressive. The vast majority of the Jews did not accept him. Perhaps some aspects of Jesus' message might have helped Judaism to reform itself in the course of its later history. But the closely knit judaïc structure and way of life continued to exist. Of course this brings in an important problem. Did Jesus want to destroy Judaism as a religion and bring in Christianity in its place or did he want to make the Jews realise the true meaning of the Covenant? It is impossible for us to touch on these problems. In the acceptance of his person and message the Jews could find true religion and freedom. Was this perhaps the mind of Jesus? The words and deeds of Jesus and his person were like seeds planted into the heart of the jewish society. All those who were ready to accept this seed produced fruits, one a hundred fold, another sixty and another thirty.

### 1. The Gospel, the Church and the Empire

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost in the little known Roman colony of Palestine. The vast Roman empire in which Jesus and the early Church lived and worked was the fruit of a slow evolution and deft synthesis of many forces. Alexander's vast conquests and the spread of Hellenism laid the foundation for a cosmopolitan society. Alexander wanted to esta-

blish a world empire. But his premature death, and the division of the empire into many kingdoms left his dream of a "World-state" unfulfilled. But the genius of Rome and the ability of Augustus (Octavian) made Alexander's dream a reality. The Roman empire was not merely a world state, but almost a living organism to which every part contributed its share. The cultural cement that kept the empire together came principally from Greece. The political-social organisation that kept the vast body moving and dynamic came from Rome. But many of the religious movements that sought to give meaning and consolation to the people were of oriental origin or the results of syncretism. The urge to universalism was an essential part of that age. Not only political unity but also the amalgamation of religious cults and philosophies were eagerly sought after.

In the year 30, i.e. around the time Jesus died the empire comprised roughly one and three quarter million square miles. It contained about fifty five to sixty million people. The *pax romana* was a durable reality. For about 300 years Rome more or less guaranteed the peace of the Empire. Basic common laws and the strict enforcement of law and order made the life of the people secure. These very positive factors helped the spread of Christianity. In fact the list of roman roads and water ways marks the route of Christianity's progress. The classical civilisation, the result of greco-roman synthesis, helped the Church to deepen and express her self-understanding and mission.

But what finally gave victory to the Gospel and to the Church was something else. The Gospel met the need of the people who were looking for freedom and fulfillment.

It is common knowledge that the objects of worship in the empire were really Rome and the Emperor. At the moment the empire was entering upon its golden age, the most important factor for its own final disintegration was established: the cult of Rome and of Augustus. One can discuss whether the emperor was deified as a result of oriental influences or of the spontaneous gratitude of the people towards their supreme benefactor. But the fact is that created, finite, transitory realities were made absolutes. The dignity of man was wounded. He was made a slave of another man and of something less than a man. The Christians resolutely resisted the idolisation of man. They



patiently suffered and died for their conviction. Their suffering and death bore witness to the inner freedom they enjoyed. This became the seed of freedom for others.

In the Empire there existed also a tremendous disparity between the rulers and the ruled. A few, often not the best had the power in their hands. Some of the vanquished and the ruled were more cultured and able than the rulers. People in general enjoyed few political rights. As the empire grew in size and power, centralisation too increased. The Roman society grew richer and more powerful. The booty carried back to the capital from the conquered regions especially from the East reached astronomical proportions. The spoils of war ran into hundreds of millions of gold coins. Rome received also fantastic amounts as tributes from the vassal states. Most of this wealth went into the royal coffers and into the pockets of the army commanders and other officials. But the citizens of Rome too received a share of this money. Luxury parks, palatial buildings, food and drink, games and other pleasures were bought with this plundered wealth. Slowly imperial Rome became the slave of wealth and pleasures.

The slaves! At first the slaves formed the source of energy, power and pleasure for the Romans. At the time of Augustus the slaves accounted for more than one third of the Roman population. But in places like Alexandria, the slaves formed half or three fourths of the total population. These slaves with no human rights, treated worse than animals, with no one to plead their cause constituted in the final analysis a great liability to the Empire. Money and slaves ruined the sturdy rustic souls of the Romans. Birth rate among the Romans fell. Marriage was no more sacred. Pleasure could be found outside of the family in the company of slaves, who could claim no rights or privileges. Abortion and the exposure of children especially of girls reached terrifying proportions. The state made laws. But no law can substitute the individual's conscience. Who was there to form the consciences of men? Who was there to change the value system on which the Empire lived?

Social injustices were terrifying. Half of Roman Africa in the middle of the second century belonged to six men! Those who profited from the military conquests and from the exploi-

tation of the land were few. Who thought or spoke of the unimportant artisans, the unemployed workmen, of the *pergrini* and of the *humiliores*? The insignificant folk like the carders, the fullers, the ropemakers, the petty shopkeepers, leather workers and so on formed the majority of the population. The Empire saw to it that they remained quiet. But scarcely did any one give a thought to them.

The Empire built a hierachical social system based on money. The senators had to possess two hundred and sixty five thousand gold sovereigns. The knights had to possess more than half that amount. These groups occupied the higher official positions in the kingdom. Then came the plebs with little or no wealth, privilege or hope.

## 2. The Gospel, the Transforming Yeast

Outwardly the Empire was impregnable, mighty and peaceful. But the seething aspirations of millions of men and women were waiting for a chance to break out into the open. We can certainly speak of a silent, suffering and patient Christian or Gospel-revolution taking place in the Empire. The Empire offered the needed revolutionary situation and the Gospel presented a new value system, a new message, a new hope and above all the Christian community offered the needed revolutionary personnel who lived and died for their faith and hope. The Gospel won against "stoicism", "the mystery cults" and "the consolations of philosophy", because the Christian faith affirmed life, turned the selfish man to the active love of his brothers and offered that inner reserve and strength which enabled men and women to live the Gospel in thick and thin. The Christian message was simple. The early Church's life inspite of all failures was transparent. Above all, the Christians enjoyed a manifest freedom and joy.

However knowingly or unknowingly the Church was building herself on the model of the Empire. Yet the hierarchy and the organisation of the Church was not based on money and power but on virtue and learning. By the side of the strictly hierarchic almost caste-wise organised society of the Empire, the Church built up a community united in a common faith that was freely accepted. It was an egalitarian community, in which

authority was more service than power. This community of love, of hope and service bore witness to an inner and outer freedom from fear and preoccupations. The vast neglected multitude of the Empire felt for the first time their inner worth. They were wanted in a community. It is true that neither Jesus nor the apostolic or early post-apostolic Church protested against slavery. But the Gospel message of "brotherhood", and the Gospel injunction to make oneself the servant of others laid the axe to the root of slavery. The early Church drawing its inspiration from the dead and risen Lord not merely proclaimed but tried to live love-filled family life. The service of the brother formed part of its existence. The Christian Community was there to form the consciences of men and women. The greatness of the persecuted Christian Community was that it did not turn itself into a religio-political extremist organization. The Christian gentleness and patience finally triumphed over human violence and hardness. Slowly but steadily the standard of the cross was conquering the Empire. But at the moment of Christianity's triumph, many Christians turned themselves into persecutors and remained so for long. The hour of the Church's triumph was also her hour of tragedy.

## PART II

### The Tragic Shift

#### A) The Constantine Era

Constantine defeated Maxentius in 312 at the Melvian Bridge. Eusebius, the Church historian claims that Constantine invoked Jesus Christ and that he owed the victory to Christ's power. In 313 through the so called Edict of Milan, Constantine and Licinius, the co-emperor, allowed the Christians, persecuted for centuries, freedom of religion. Each man should be allowed to obey the dictates of his conscience. Both the emperors accorded to the pagans what they granted the Christians. Each man has the right to choose and practise the cult that he prefers without his honour or his convictions being attacked. "Thus there will be peace in our time", decreed the emperors. Though Constantine was not yet a baptised Christian he showed his favour to the Church. But the emperors for the sake of peace allowed freedom of conscience with regard to all forms of religious

cults. Church properties and buildings confiscated by the previous regimes were given back to the christian community.

According to Eusebius of Caesarea, "One God was recognized for entire humanity; at the same time, one single, universal power, the Roman Empire, rose and prospered. Inexpiable hatred between peoples was henceforth banished, and with the understanding of the one God, of the one way of salvation, the Christian doctrine was spread far and wide. So it followed that during this period, since one single sovereign was invested with unrestrained authority, a profound peace reigned over the whole world. Thus through the express will of God himself, two sources of happiness and well-being surged forth together for the good of mankind: the Roman empire and the Christian doctrine of love". These exaggerated praise of Constantine's rule contains a grain of truth. With the Constantine era, the decisive step towards the christinisation of the West began. Under him and after him the Church grew. Constantine had the genius to see that the old order was a spent force. The future belonged to the Christian community. In his legislation, he tried to incorporate Christian principles and values. As he himself wrote, "to restore the ancient vigour to the whole body of the empire which is stricken by a terrible sickness", Christianity alone seemed to be the right ally.

But this policy had its negative side. While addressing the assembled bishops of a council, the emperor once said: "You are bishops within the Church; but I am the bishop outside it." The emperor considered himself the main protector of religion. He convened councils. He made himself the arbitor between contending theological groups. At the Council of Nicea the emperor was ready to use force to get the formula of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father accepted. Moreover, in the hands of Constantine and the later rulers religion became an instrument of national unity and of public order and peace. We have no reason to question the good faith of Constantine in his support of the Church. Still it is clear that in all his policies he never lost sight of his overriding care for the interests of the state. One may not call him the creator of Caesaropapism. But from his time this danger loomed large on the horizon. After all, the tradition of the empire before Constantine was built on the basis



of the fusion of religion and politics. From the time of Constantine instead of paganism and emperor-cult, Christianity is made the religious and cultural basis of the empire. The emperor instead of being the object of worship, now became the supreme protector of religion. The Church was now ready to accept the Christian emperors and kings as divinely appointed rulers of people and defenders of faith.

In the East, the Church, the state and the hellenic culture would merge into one. In course of time the Church would be subordinated to the state. Finally, Islam would make a clean sweep of the weak Empire and the unfree Churches.

In the West the fight between the Church and the kings would continue for centuries with varying fortunes till by force of circumstances the Church and state would be separated. But in the beginning, the Church being grateful to her benefactor allowed him to interfere in religious matters. When threatened by the danger of heresy and of division, the Church would ask the protection and support of the secular arm. The Church for example sought Constantine's help to suppress the Donatist heresy. A new trend was started in the Church. Though Constantine allowed freedom of conscience as far as religion was concerned, still he in the latter half of his rule initiated a number of anti-pagan measures. At the instigation of Church-men the oracle of Apollo was forbidden, one magician Sopatros was executed, the books of Porphyry were destroyed. The Church or Church-men persuaded the imperial power to intervene against the Arian heresy. Some years after Constantine's death we see the persecuted Church, gradually becoming intolerant. She hunted down pagans, equated heresy and schism with crime. She used her power to have them punished. From the close connection between the Church and the State the steps taken by Theodosius logically follow.

## **B) After Constantine**

On 28th of February, 380, Theodosius proclaimed an edict: "All our people are to rally to the faith brought to the Romans by the Apostle Peter, to that professed by Pope Damasus and Bishop Peter of Alexandria; in other words they are to recognise the Holy Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". The

Empire must rally to the faith, i.e. to the the Emperor's faith. Those who disobeyed the order were termed infamous. "God will revenge himself upon such people, and so will we", decreed the emperor. The authorities in the Church and the Emperor wanted one empire, one faith. The enemies of God became those of the state. The freedom of conscience for which the early apostolic and post-apostolic Church fought and died and which Constantine at least in principle granted was peremptorily done away with. Given the logic of history and of the growth of dogma this development was natural. We have had to wait till the second Vat. Council to see this fundamental principle once again accepted and upheld by the Church.

It is painful to recount here the anti-pagan measures undertaken and carried out by the Empire. Theodosius perfecting the practical steps taken by Gratian and Valentinian disallowed even the private practice of pagan religious cult and faith. Temples were closed by the police. In the countryside ancient and traditional cults were attacked by groups of Christians. "Any house where incense is burned shall be confiscated by the Exchequer". In all these measures the bishops actively supported the state. It is true that men like Ambrose and Chrysostom faced the king boldly when he violated certain moral principles. Unfortunately freedom of the individual and of society was no more a moral value accepted by many of the Christian authorities. This tendency will grow into frightening proportions during the Carolingian times. Not only did Charlemagne almost totally interfere in Church matters, such as the appointment of bishops, abbots etc. but also he used the sword to extend the frontiers of Christendom. The emperor's Saxon war which lasted 31 years, and which ravaged and exhausted part of Germany finally succeeded in imposing western civilisation and Christianity on Germany. Daniel Rops, a rather friendly historian of the Church says: "The thing that hurts is that such means were used to establish Christianity. Charlemagne's soldiers saddled Saxony and Hungary with the Gospel exactly as the champions of Allah had saddled Spain with the Quran, exactly as the margraves of Brandenburg and the Teutonic knights were to do in Prussia". "Charlemagne actually practised a policy of conversion by terror, which once past the moment of inescapable violence, established a system of coercion in religious matters which is almost unbelievable".

True the Church-man Alcuin wrote to the king: "Persuasion, gentleness, charity, these are the weapons for winning souls". But there were other Church-men who were less scrupulous in using power and force to impose the Christian way of life on others.

Not only the West, but also the East indulged in the use of force and punishment for the sake of maintaining Christian life and discipline. Already before the final split between the Eastern and the Western Churches, the civil courts in Byzantium took cognizance of blasphemy, profanation, sacrilege and other crimes. Excommunicated persons were imprisoned. Those who sat or knelt during vespers on the vigil of great feasts were punished with a fine, "for only he who prays standing honours the resurrection".

We already remarked that even before the Edict of Milan, the Christian community was organising itself. Metropolitan sees, dioceses (a Roman term indicating an administrative unit) with bishops (later priests too) were gradually established. As Church property increased through royal bounty and the generous bequeathals of pious Christians, the need to organize the Community became more urgent. In the West the Roman see became the seat of power and prestige. In the East Constantinople claimed for itself authority over the great sees like Antioch and Alexandria.

### **C) Religious and Secular Powers Vested in one Person**

The Church authorities, especially the bishop of Rome needed freedom from secular powers to act freely in religious matters. This search for religious and secular freedom seemed to have found its goal when Pepin the father of Charlemagne defended Rome against the attacks of the Lombards and handed over the territories wrested from the enemies to the Pope. Thus the Pope, the spiritual head of the Church was simultaneously turned into a secular ruler, too. The papal states lasted from 756 to 1870. Theoretically the Pope became independent of the Basileus and of other kings. In practice the Church entered into a long period of secular preoccupations and political instability. Ever changing political allegiances, ever new concordats, and the use of force to achieve the Church's secular and religious objectives followed. Together with enormous secular and religious

power, money and security, corruption, immorality and violent power struggles became part of the Church. Islam destroyed the geographical unity of the Church. Heresies and schisms ate into the inner unity of faith. The few doors now open to the official Church to preserve her unity, prestige and power were the crusades, the inquisition and other similar institutions.

The inner freedom and spontaneity of the Gospel suffered grievously from the new turn the Church took. Caesaro-Papism and Papo-Cesarism dealt violent blows to the Gospel values. The values of the Roman Empire and some of the attitudes of Judaism crept into the Christian community. In the beginning, for example, the Gospel was spread through personal contact. The *martyrium* of the simple faithful and of the great charismatic figures testified to the power of the Message of Love and Truth. With the advent of political power to the Church, she turned to the method of converting the rulers and leaders of the people first and through them bringing the populace to the Church. The non-Christian principle of *cujus regio, ejus religio* which is fundamentally a denial of "Christian faith" and against which the early Church fought, was accepted. All know at least to some extent the history of the conversion of the Franks through the conversion of king Clovis. The principle of absolute monarchy with the implicit idea that the ruler incorporates in himself the ruled including their religion is involved in this method. Even such a far-sighted and "faith-filled" saint as St. Ignatius of Loyola advised his followers to preach the Gospel to the kings and leading men of a new nation. For Jesus the proclamation of the message of freedom and love to the poor was the sure sign of the presence of the Promised One in the midst of the people!

The developments from the time of Constantine till the loss of the Papal states in 1870 or even perhaps up to Vat. II showed a confusion and mixing up of religious and political powers. The Church used sometimes spiritual powers (excommunication) to achieve political objectives and sometimes political force to achieve religious ends. This has harmed the spiritual freedom and authority of the Church more than anything else. In the minds of many good Catholics the union of Church and state is even today an ideal worth striving after.



#### D) The great missionary movements

It is this Church which launched the big missionary movements of 16th and 17th centuries. In the first centuries of our era, the Empire was converted by the people of the place. The Christians lived, moved and had their being in the Empire and in the hellenistic-Roman culture. Of course even the Jews were much influenced by that culture. The ecclesiastical institutions did not differ externally much from the other secular institutions. But by 16th century the Roman Church (let us leave out the Eastern Churches) and later the Protestant Churches had created or taken on definite cultural forms. A Christian Western culture with elaborate systems of philosophy and theology, architecture, ways of worship, music was well established. This cultural heritage and its religious roots constituted "Christianity" in the minds of most of the Christians. Moreover, the western colonial expansion and the expansion of the Church were for many Christians just the two sides of one and the same reality—the spread of Christendom. Certainly, to the non-Christians (even today) these two formed just one complex whole. The new missionary movement unlike the efforts of the early Church was a part of the triumphant movement of the West into the Americas, the East and Africa. The "religio-cultural-political packet" was distributed to the non-Christian peoples.

In the Americas, which are today almost "fully Christian", the native population was either destroyed or pushed back into the jungles. Their cultures were destroyed. Slaves became a part of the socio-economic structure of these countries. Of course the Churches could claim that the colonial powers and the inhuman soldiers were the cause of this terrible vandalism. Did not some missionaries protest against atrocities and injustices? True! But how many more Church men were there quite ready to accept and legitimize those actions? Is there a Church apart from the Christians? One of the principal functions of the early Church was to form the consciences of people. What was the work of most of the clergy of this period? I have heard it said by good and pious priests even up to this day that the Church gave to the people, or Spain gave to South America the inestimable treasure of faith. Unfortunately, the Christians were quite satisfied with the gold, the land and the freedom of the poor

people. In fact only the East-India, China (Japan with the help of widespread violence against the Christians) and the Islamic world have withstood the Christian missionary efforts. I do know that the historical facts are immensely more complicated than the simple and sketchy picture I have painted here. But no one familiar with history can paint a flawless and bright coloured and clear picture of the Christianisation of the non-European world. As far as the growth in the freedom of individuals and of societies is concerned, which certainly was one of the prime objectives of Jesus' message, one cannot always praise the work of the Church.

The mixing up of religion, culture and politics was at the root of the Chinese rites controversies. Out of the same source sprang the colour prejudice which denied Asians the right to enter seminaries and religious congregations. (Of course, today the Church and most of the religious families are speaking of the Third-world as the hope and future of the Church!) Even today the remnants of these attitudes continue to exist. The religio-cultural (today technological and economic) superiority often finds explicit or implicit expression in quite many foreign missionaries working in the "mission countries" and in western ecclesiastical circles. In the various fields of Church life beginning with theology the Western Churches exercise not merely a certain influence but often pressure on the Third-world Churches. Certainly the Churches in the different countries either enjoy or suffer from more or less the same privileges and tribulations as the people at large. We cannot yet speak of tangible equality between the various local Churches, except for the simple fact that all belong to the same universal Church.

I do believe that inspite of all her defects, reactionary attitudes and actions, mistakes and positive sinfulness, the Church has tried to keep the Gospel alive and active in the world.

We know that freedom can never be fully chained or chained for long. As the Christian community became more and more organized and more and more centralized, there arose movements within the community which reasserted with vigour the spontaneity, freedom and "powerlessness" of the Gospel. For a Christian of the early Church to die as Christ's martyr was the greatest act of devotion and fulfilment. Virginity from the early

period of the Church was considered an abiding martyrdom. As persecutions became less and less, more and more Christians especially women became *continentes*. Even before the constantinian era, the monastic movement began. St. Paul and Antony led the way. To affirm the poverty, the fasting and prayer of Jesus Christ, to be free to affirm the radical values of the Gospel in a world and Church which were increasingly becoming "secular", that was the purpose of monasticism. Basil and Benedict gave the scattered monks community life and rules. In the course of her history, the spirit of the Gospel alive in the Church would produce innumerable men and women who were ready to swim against the prevalent current in the world and even in certain circles of the Church. Francis of Assisi, Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola and Don Bosco are just a few such men. Monasticism and later religious life in the Church were an implicit protest against an unfree and enslaving world and a worldly Church. Through life innumerable Christians wanted to show that the Gospel was alive and active in the Church and in the world. The cultural influence of the monks and religious men on Europe is well known to all. Even in the darkest period of the Dark Ages, Pope Nicholas I could oppose the use of force as an act of injustice. During the period of massive colonialism and missionary expansion of the Church, there were a few missionaries who were free enough to oppose the injustices and inhumanities meted out to the poor natives and slaves. There were at every age men who refused to ally themselves with the socio-political power structures in the Church.

Today the Church is certainly dynamic and vibrant. The new consciousness of social responsibility goes beyond the traditional concept of "charity" and help. The theology of liberation is now trying to liberate theology itself from its many alienations. The attitude of respect for men of other faiths and even for other faiths is something new in the Church. Today the Church is ready to receive from others. Up to now she was convinced that her only duty was to give and to convert. She is ready to promote sincere dialogue with men of all faiths or of no faith. She shows a lively openness to facts. She is not wedded to *a priori* theories and formulae as in the past. The Kingdom of God is wider and deeper than the external and visible community of Christians. God's ways are not identical with the ways of the

Church-authorities. He is free to act in his own way with all men.

These are all very positive signs which show the presence and activity of the Spirit of Christ in the Church. These are the facts which give us the hope that the Church has an inalienable mission to make people and societies free through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### PART III

## Theological Reflections

Still, as believing Christians, yet as men who refuse to deny or to distort facts, we should reflect on the historical growth of the Christian community, which we call the "ecclesia".

1) In the synoptic Gospels especially, Jesus is pictured as absolutely "God or Father centred". There are of course a number of sayings in these Gospels which are interpreted as "divinity-statements". I am in no way questioning these "sayings of Jesus" nor am I opposing the way the early Church, the Councils and the Church all through her history understood them. But the most important point I want to make is the "God-centred" nature of Jesus' being and life. Out of this God-centredness Jesus' love for man, for his freedom and fulfillment sprang. But by the end of the apostolic period or better by the time the early Councils met, the Church became a "Christ-centred" community. We can substantiate this change with both scriptural and patristic texts. Once again my intention here is not to question or to express doubt about the legitimacy of this step. But what matters for me is the next step.

The Risen Lord who is the centre and goal of the Church and of humanity is no more physically present in the community now. His resurrection and ascension removed his physical presence from this world. It is the Christian faith that Jesus and his message continue to live and to operate in and through the Church, especially in and through the men possessing authority in the community. Is it not authority that represents, unifies the community? This conviction slowly developed in such a way that the Church and especially the authority in the Church began to assume the central position. Any impartial



observer can notice in the attitudes and even in the writings of many Christians an ecclesio- and authority-centrism. If Jesus is the only mediator between God and man, then the Church alone becomes the ark of salvation. The keys to man's eternal destiny is held by the men in authority.

A number of theological principles and non-theological ideologies are behind this development. The establishment of the Church by Jesus Christ, the promise of the presence of the Spirit in the Christian community, the place of Peter in the apostolic community, the special position of the apostles and the idea of apostolic succession, the conviction that Jesus alone is the saviour of men were fused with such facts as the importance of a city, the patronage or the possession of political power, and the acceptance of one's culture as superior to all others. The old Roman tendency to place secular and religious authority in one person, the theocratic ideal of Judaism, the post-exilic Jewish inclination to make the priests rulers of man's conscience and other similar factors were slowly brought together to make a theological amalgam.

The Christian Church, chiefly the Church authorities claimed absolute power over kings and people both Christian and non-Christian. A Pope could divide the non-European world into two and give half each to Spain and Portugal. The Church could dissolve non-Christian marriages in favour of faith. The secular arm could be used to defend and propagate the faith. Humility, and obedience became the Christian virtues par excellence. The will of God meant the will of the person in authority.

If the Church is the only ark of salvation, if she is the centre of the human community, then she can defend her unity and expand herself by any means that she thinks most expedient. Since the Church, and her authorities form the ark of salvation and the holders of the key to sacramental, life, there arose the idea of the primacy of the society over the individual. In the Gospel, Jesus pictures God as a Father who leaving the ninety-nine faithful, goes after the one lost sheep. For Jesus the individual person is more important than laws and systems, faith formulae and external practices. In the course of her history, the Church as a whole did not keep this orienta-

tion of Jesus. The Church is not an end in itself. God alone can in the final analysis claim that in the strictest sense of the term. But the Church because of the confused mixing up of faith and ideologies made herself an end in itself. This has been a cause of many ills both inside and outside the Church.

Since the Church thought of herself as the vehicle and custodian of man's final fulfillment, she thought that all men should become her visible members. Did not Jesus, the only saviour of men say that his disciples should preach the Gospel to all nations? In the parable of the marriage feast does not the master of the house tell his servants: compel them to enter? When the secular and religious authorities came together, did not Christianity see that as a divine sign to make itself the only religion of mankind?

2) The Christian community right from the beginning considered itself as the elect and chosen group. She was the assembly of "saints". Of course St. Paul did not mean that all Christians were actually sinless people. She understood herself as the New Israel. When the final separation between Judaism and the Christian community took place, this way of expressing her own self identity grew stronger. In many fundamental points both Judaism and the Church differed. But in the idea of election, of separation from the other unholy people both the communities showed very many similarities. The belief in one's community's election implies the conviction of its uniqueness. As far as the Church is concerned, her faith in the unique mediatorship of Jesus, her conviction that she alone is the vehicle of Christ's salvation offered her the ground to consider herself a privileged reality. She cannot in principle accept any other non-Christian community as her equal. This was and still is part of the Church's self-understanding. In spite of persecutions, troubles, moments of failure she will win, for God is with her. The dragon and the beast and the harlot are in the final analysis powerless. When such a religious understanding is fused with a particular cultural form and with political power, the consequences for the men of other faiths are ominous. The history of Christianity and of Islam prove the truth of this statement. Even today we cannot understand what is happening in Iran without a thorough knowledge of this fact.

3) All would agree that Jesus preached the "law of love". Jesus' precept of love, above all his life, death and resurrection offer us the basis of our Christian life. In Jesus we see, touch and handle the love of God. The risen Jesus gives us the Spirit of truth and love. Certainly Jesus loved truth, sought it and died for it. For him truth and love formed the two sides of one reality. One is not opposed to the other. He loved sinful men, men in whom the light of truth was blurred and love was not alive. But his love remade them, gave them reality and love. Jesus knew that love gave sight to men and that love could remake man. For Jesus truth and love centred round the concrete person, concrete reality. We may not be too far from the truth if we were to say that love was primordial in Jesus' life and actions. By the medieval period, the Church became a Church of truth. Truth was not understood in its concreteness, reality centredness, but was considered in a very abstract and impersonal way. Formulae, particular statements and formulations were thought of as banks of truth. Allegiance to formulae became the sign of allegiance to truth. Where love is undervalued truth becomes abstract, mathematical, a dead ideology.

Only real love, i. e., love of the real person makes one see the truth that people are differently constituted, that they have different backgrounds, that they have different perceptions and that they can find meaning and purpose in different ways. Above all it is only existential love that makes one see the mysteriousness of God's dealings with men. The crusades and the inquisition, the Syllabus and so many other measures the Church took in her history can be understood to some extent, if we can view them as the inevitable steps of a community which thought of itself as the possessor and protector of truth. In this connection we might raise the issue whether truth can be protected. Certainly, formulae and abstract statements can be kept intact. Given our human situation we should have some care for words and formulae. But truth which is finally reality itself is self-evident and self-protective.

Of course much of what has been said above could be called anachronistic. Should we not understand the mentality of people of those times? Did they not have a different way of thinking and acting? True! I certainly do not deny that. But

Constantine and Licinius, two pagan emperors could proclaim freedom of religion in their empire. Practical socio-political reasons could teach them that much. But as Constantine became more and more inclined to the Church, less and less did he allow freedom of religion to the non-Christians. Even St. Thomas thinks of a certain freedom for heretics and schismatics and for the religious rites of the non-Christians only on the ground of order, peace and expediency. The Church had to wait till Vat. II to have an official, positive statement on man's inalienable freedom of conscience and religion. Is this statement once again based on reasons of expediency? What I cannot understand is that considerations of expediency, peace and public order could reach a truth, which the faith of the Church could not perceive for centuries! The only question I want to raise here is: Why?

Jesus could rebuke the apostles who wanted to bring down fire on the inhospitable samaritan village. He thought that any one who was not against him was with him, a very untribal and universal attitude. The Jains and after them many of the Indians could perceive the complexity of reality and the incapability of man to comprehend reality fully. Out of this attitude a certain tolerance and mutual acceptance could become the heritage of India, in spite of all inter sectarian troubles and fights. We need, therefore, to study much more deeply the reasons behind the intolerant attitudes cultivated by the Church and the semitic religions in general.

4) Authority in the Roman empire was absolute. We speak of oriental despots. But the kings and emperors of Europe were despots too. According to them the limits to authority could come only from the possessors of authority and power. Jesus knew the danger of such power and authority. He radically changed the idea of authority in his community. In his "ecclesia" he wanted only servants and not kings, presidents and rulers. In the early Church, Paul could disagree with Peter. There were conflicts and misunderstandings between Paul and his co-workers. As the Church grew in number, wealth, power and organisation, her conception of power and authority too changed. This can be noticed in the apostolic Church itself. As the Christian community came into contact with the Empire, by a process of osmosis it absorbed the power structure of Rome. Moreover, the



legalistic side of Judaism which Paul attacked with vigour in his major letters became an aspect of the Church. The Christian conception of authority as service got inlaid with the imperial and later with the feudalistic ideas of authority and with Judaic legalism. The Church authority became absolute. Since religion touches every aspect of human life, it was natural for religious authority to claim a sort of all-embracing power. Even today one cannot appeal against Church authority. A Christian cannot radically question it. The only way out for him is to leave the Church. In the past this final step was fraught with dangers.

The idea of corporate personality helped the Church authorities to think of themselves as incorporating the whole community in themselves. They could in virtue of their power and position make decisions for the Christians. Their will could be considered the will of the people. In the history of the Church, the religious and the secular powers got fused. This is the reason why Pius the IX could excommunicate people who questioned the legitimacy and opportuneness of the papal states. Though the Churches have lost almost completely secular power, still her basic conception of authority is absolutistic. The only limits to authority come from the persons in authority. This principle needs our careful consideration. As a matter of fact the way authority is exercised in the Church today is on the whole not so autocratic as the principle seems to indicate. But still the principle itself needs to be studied. In the mind of Jesus freedom is a value. Authority is to serve freedom. To make men and society free to love God and men, this is what Jesus wants. We may ask the question whether that has been the objective of the Church. This problem brings to the fore the whole problem of obedience in the Church. It has a lot to do with growth in freedom. But we are forced to leave the matter for another study.

5) In this context I would very earnestly plead for a comparative historical and theological study of the way in which Buddhism on the one side and Christianity and Islam on the other have spread themselves. Historical facts should not be neglected by religious thinkers.

A further point that needs our attention is the following: We know that the Church did not succeed in winning over all the Jews or at least a good part of them. Even today Judaism

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continues to live, though as before it remains the religion of a minority group. But the Christian community achieved considerable success with the Gentiles before Constantine. Once the Empire became Christian, her success was almost complete. So also her success in the Americas was great. There too the Christians obtained complete political power. When we compare these countries with Asia, the picture that emerges is quite different. Except in the Philippines, no where in Asia did a Christian nation obtain absolute socio-political control—not even in India. Asia still continues to preserve her traditional religions. They seem to be staging a come back. In fact they are aggressively pushing forward their frontiers into the Christian countries of Europe and the Americas. Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. are well knit socio-religious realities. Their adherents have found their self-identity and meaning in these religions. Against these religious communities, the Christian missionary efforts have up to now been unsuccessful. In a country like India, with its feudalism, religious obscurantism, lack of freedom, and the widespread oppression and injustice should have been a suitable ground for the spread of Christianity. But India and other Asian countries seem to be slowly distancing themselves from official Christianity. If the Church succeeded in Rome, why not in Asia which is in many respects very similar to the Rome of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. My only hope is that theologians will take these facts very seriously into their theologizing.

6) A last reflection I would like to propose before I conclude this rather long study. Most of the anomalies we have referred to in the Church in the course of her history are rooted in the unfortunate mixing up of faith and ideologies. In this connection I would like to refer the reader to the two chapters of J.L. Segundo's book *The Liberation of Theology* ("Ideologies and Faith" and "Ideologies, Church and Eschatology"). The point he makes and according to him one of the major points of Vat. II's document *Gaudium et Spes* is that faith does not immediately give a Christian and for that matter the Church authorities precise instruments to measure historical situations or pre-established standards to reach concrete decisions. Individual Christians and the official Church are constantly facing situations, peoples, turns in history and conflicting human aspirations and endeavours which demand definite and decisive actions. *Gaudium et Spes* says "faith throws new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human". Yet at the same time the Council Fathers are convinced: "In fidelity to conscience Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relation-

ships". Certainly the Gospel and the Christian faith form the guiding light in the search for the truth in each situation. They serve the Christians to reach solutions to human problems. But the solutions themselves are not final. Each new situation demands new decisions.

The important point we have to note here is that the options Christians make depend on the system of goals and means that serve as the backdrop for any human problem. Ideology in our context means the ideas one forms in the concrete of the goal, of the process and the proper means to achieve an objective. Faith is not ideology. But faith needs an ideology; faith forces us to choose or form an ideology so that it becomes dynamic, and effectively operative.

The point I want to make here is that Christians and the official Church when confronted with problems of concrete existence accepted and sometimes adopted ideologies which were not fully consonant with the Gospel values. Some of these ideologies were extremely effective in the secular sphere or in Judaism. For example, the implicit acceptance of the Church as an end in itself, the conception of authority, of power, of office, etc. which evolved in the Church in course of time, the Church's absolutely negative attitudes to non-Christian religions were the results of ideologies which were taken over from the Greco-Roman or the Judaic world. Since faith and ideology are in life and action interconnected, ideology is equated with faith and is hence canonised and eternalised. This is what really happened to the Church.

Today with the new insights that come from religious sociology, psychology and other branches of human sciences we are getting a more just view of some of the baffling things of religion. Fortunately Vat. II's *Gaudium et Spes* and the *Lumen Gentium's* conception of the Church as the pilgrim people of God are now paving the way to a more adequate understanding of the Church as an agent of genuine freedom. This return to the Gospel is what gives us Christians hope for the future.

(In the writing of this essay I have made liberal use of Daniel Rops' *History of the Church*, H. Küng's: *The Church*, and J. L. Segundo's: *The Liberation of Theology*. Many other books like Toynbee's *A Study of History*, H. R. Niebhuur's *Christ and Culture* have been consulted.)

# The Dialectic of History

To do justice to the theme I should cover the entire philosophy of Marx, which is not possible within the space of a short article. What is offered here is no more than an overview. The reader is forewarned that many a detail will remain blurred, many a concept unexplained.

The course of history, according to Marx, is determined by two dialectical movements which are themselves dialectically interrelated: the dialectic of man and structures and the dialectic between structures. The two have their ultimate centre of unity in the human being as the subject of history.

## The dialectic of man and structures

Human beings do not live in a vacuum, but in an environment of things, persons, and structures. Of these by far the most significant are structures, meaning the stable and normative patterns of acting and thinking in any society. Produced by man and constantly modified by him, structures also react upon him for good or for bad. They become alienating when they rule over men and hamper the unfolding of their being. The challenge then is to get rid of them and create instead non-alienating structures. It is the awareness of alienation that leads to revolutionary praxis aimed at restructuring society and culture.

Seen from this angle, universal history falls into three major phases. The first is what Marx calls primitive communism where property was owned, and decisions taken, in common. Man then lived in immediate unity with nature and fellowmen. Alienation there was none, as private property – which, for Marx, is the root of all alienation – had not yet come into being. The second phase signals the emergence of private property and with it man's estrangement from nature and society. Private property has assumed various forms in the course of history. In western Europe it took the form of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, in that order. But Marx did not make the sequence valid for all



nations.<sup>1</sup> He admitted pluralism of historical development with regard to various countries and peoples. As for India, he held that primitive communism was followed not by slavery but by what he called "the Asiatic mode of production" in which property was held in common by local communities.<sup>2</sup>

The third historical phase is that of communism resulting from the definitive abolition of private property and, along with it, of all alienation. As the young Marx writes, "Communism is the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social, i. e. human, being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development".<sup>3</sup>

Here it is important to clearly grasp what Marx means by supersession. The term has Hegelian connotations. Both in Hegel and Marx it is a three dimensional concept meaning at once negation, preservation, and sublimation. To supersede capitalism, for instance, means negating what is dehumanizing in it, preserving whatever it has of positive value, and realizing the latter more fully on a higher plane. It is not as though communism will be built on the ruins of capitalism in the wake of a purely destructive revolution. That is why Marx can speak of the supersession of private property as a process that carries with it the wealth of all previous development. In the onward march of the dialectic nothing of value is lost.

It is this historical perspective of total disalienation that makes the philosophy of Marx a humanism, a theory of revolution, and a project of hope. A humanism, because the subject and the object, the beginning and the end (if end there be), of the entire process is the human being. The immanent goal of history is a new society "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".<sup>4</sup> But to realize

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1. See Marx's reply to Mikhailovsky (1877), in David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx, An Introduction* Macmillan, 1971, PP. 135-6.

2. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Pelican Books, 1973, PP. 471-479.

3. *Early Writings*, Marx, Pelican, 1975, P. 348.

4. Marx-Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973, P. 76.

that goal man must eliminate the root cause of all alienation, private property. Hence Marx's concern to define the objective and subjective conditions under which revolutionary practice can emerge and come to a successful issue. With him philosophy becomes a theory of revolution as well. The concept of praxis involves also the hope in the possibility of overcoming alienation and fashioning a humanized world.

Significantly, some of the central motifs of the religious world view reappear in Marx, though charged with a new content. The myth of the fall from primal integrity finds its counterpart in the idea of mankind's lapse from tribal communism into the regime of private property. The notion of sin reechoes in that of alienation. The struggle against the satanic forces of evil has much in common with revolutionary praxis. So too, one may see in the classless society of the future a secularized version of the religious belief in total liberation and the coming of the new heaven and the new earth.

The dialectic of man and structures, of alienation and disalienation, is, for Marx, the mainspring of history. But to highlight it exclusively would create the wrong impression that he viewed history as a matter solely of the human will. As though one fine morning men and women suddenly awakened to the realization that they could develop their powers only by alienating themselves in structures and forthwith set about doing so, and another fine morning decided to pull down what they had set up. No, the course of history is also shaped by factors that enjoy a certain autonomy in relation to human will. Such is the dialectic governing the relation between objective social structures. However, objective structural processes and the subjective initiative of human beings do not run parallelly but from a tensional unity, each reacting upon and moulding the other. An illustration, admittedly naive, might help here. When I pedal my bi-cycle, it moves forward, horizontally. But what generates the forward movement is the vertical movement of my legs. The vertical movement feeds the horizontal and vice versa. The illustration, of course, is misleading if taken literally. For the structural processes in society are less directly dependent on human decisions than is the movement of my legs on my will. To come back to the point at issue, the objective movement of structures

determines and is determined by the more subjective process of alienation and disalienation.

### The dialectic of structures

Of all structures human being brings into existence the most fundamental is the economic structure (for a preliminary definition of the term, see *Negations*, no. 4, p. 20). "In the social production", writes Marx, "which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness".<sup>5</sup> This is generally taken as the clearest formulation in Marx of the materialistic conception of history.

But taken in isolation from the overall context of Marx's writings, the text can give a distorted picture of his thinking. From it one might conclude that the economic structure is totally independent of man, that it is not human beings but the economy that produces political relations and ideologies, or that human consciousness in no way determines social life. Such conclusions are unwarranted. For elsewhere in his writings Marx also stresses the role of man as the creator of structures. "It is men", he writes, "who, in developing their material production and their material intercourse, change, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking".<sup>6</sup> Again, "Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a determinate development of their productive forces, and of the intercourse which

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5. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, PP. 20–1.

6. Marx–Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, P. 42.

corresponds to these, up to its most extensive forms'.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, then, if the economic base determines relations of power and structures of thought, it is not without the mediation of human beings.

That our thinking and theorizing are conditioned by productive forces and relations of production is beyond doubt. And no contemporary sociologist worth the name will deny it. But Marx seems to go further and explain the realities of the superstructure as mere reflexes of the economic life of individuals. He writes, for instance: "The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence".<sup>8</sup> Here Marx's thinking is vitiated by a certain economic reductionism in so far as he sees the economy as *primordial* and every other realm of life as *derivative*.

Marx traces the root of superstructural realities now to productive forces,<sup>9</sup> now to relations of production,<sup>10</sup> now to the unity of productive forces and relations of production (infrastructure),<sup>11</sup> now to human beings inasmuch as they are economically active within given productive forces and production relations.<sup>12</sup> His varying formulations must be taken as partial and mutually complementary. I suggest the following formulation as one that would satisfy the different concerns of Marx: The materialist conception of history holds that the production of political relations and forms of consciousness on the part of individuals and groups is determined by the economic structure within which they carry on material production.

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7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. *Grundrisse*, P. 540.

10. Capital III, in *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* ed T. B. Bottomore and Maximilian Rubel, Pelican Books, 1970, (abrev. SW), PP. 112-3.

11. See no. 5 above.

12. See no. 6 above.



Though Marx was of the view that economic life determines politics and culture, he admitted that once the latter have come into being, they can react upon the economic base. Thus in regard to the state he writes: "The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relations of domination and servitude, as it emerges directly out of production itself and in its turn reacts upon production".<sup>13</sup> The same holds true of ideological production. "Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of all production which he accomplishes. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, have a greater or lesser influences upon all his functions and activities, including his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In this sense, it can be truly asserted that all human relations and functions, however and wherever they manifest themselves, influence material production and have a more or less *determining* effect upon it".<sup>14</sup> It is significant that Marx deduces the influence of other areas of life on the economy from the fact that man himself is the basis of all production. Detached from the human subject, the dialectic of structures makes no sense.

But the impact of the superstructure on the base is only derivative as it is itself determined by the latter. This comes out clearly in Marx's answer to the objection how was one to explain the fact that in ancient Rome and Athens politics, and in the European Middle Ages Catholicism, reigned supreme. He argues, "This much, however, is clear: that the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why in one case politics, and in the other Catholicism, played the chief part".<sup>15</sup>

### Contradictions and change

If material production determines politics and culture, will there not be perfect harmony in society and, consequently, no

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13. *Capital*, III in, SW, PP. 112-3.

14. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* I, in SW, P. 113.

15. *Capital* I, in SW, PP. 108.

possibility of change? Marx would answer that it is only at the initial stages when a social system has just arisen that equilibrium prevails. In course of time contradictions are bound to develop starting from the economic base upwards. The following are the major types of contradiction, listed in the order of derivation:

i. *Contradiction between productive forces and relations of production:* "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution".<sup>16</sup> In other words, the expanding productive forces burst asunder the enveloping integument of existing social relations. This is a process taking place, as it were, behind the back of individuals, i. e. without their conscious intervention.

ii. *Contradiction within the relations of production:* What is meant here is the class contradiction between the direct producers and those who appropriate the surplus product, as between slave and master, serf and lord, labourer and capitalist.<sup>17</sup> This contradiction too is, at least initially, a merely objective process consisting in a conflict of interests of which the parties concerned may not be aware. Just as today in India many industrial workers think the interests of the bourgeoisie to be identical with their own, though, objectively, the two interests are contradictory. It is only gradually that the labourer and the capitalist become conscious of their own class interests. Then begins a period of class struggle.

iii. *Contradiction between the base and the superstructure:* After stating that the development of the productive forces reach a point where they disrupt the prevailing property relations, Marx continues, "With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense super-structure is more or less rapidly

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16. See no. 5 above.

17. *The German Ideology*, P. 60.

transformed".<sup>18</sup> Put differently, the existing political relations and forms of consciousness become obsolete in the context of the profound changes that have taken place within the economy. And they break up under the pressure from below.

iv. *Contradictions within the superstructure*: Marx has nowhere systematically dealt with this. From his scattered remarks one can identify two kinds of contradictions in the superstructure: the one between political relations and ideology; the other between conflicting ideologies; especially between the ideology of the declining classes and that of the emerging ones.

Each of the major contradictions mentioned above can harbour minor ones so that in times of crisis society starts seething with multiple contradictions: between production, circulation and consumption, between ascending classes and decaying ones, between bureaucracy and people, between the legislature and the executive, between teachers and the taught, between religion and morality, and so on and so forth. The maturing of these contradictions results in social revolution.

The ripening of the contradictions between social condition and ideology is conditioned by the contradiction between man and structures. Both the experience of alienation and the collective will to overcome it are shaped by the objective contradictions brewing in society. In interpreting the Marxian conception of history it is necessary to maintain the unity in tension between the objective dialectic of structures and the subjective dialectic of human praxis. Scholars who focus exclusively on the first reduce Marxism to a sort of natural science with its own inexorable laws. They forget that, for Marx, history is "nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends",<sup>19</sup> that "revolution is the motive force of history".<sup>20</sup> Those, on the other hand, who one-sidedly stress the dialectic of man and structures, of alienation and disalienation, denude Marxism of all scientific character, reducing it to a brand of voluntarism and aesthetics.

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18. See no. 5 above.

19. Marx-Engels, *The Holy Family*, in SW, P. 78.

20. *German Ideology*, P. 61.

### An assessment

1. Marx's remains the most serious attempt made so far to understand the complexity of the historical process. His greatest contribution is to have shown that history cannot be understood purely in terms of the development of ideas or the evolution of political systems but has to be seen in the context of the economic life of people. He is correct in pointing out the determining effect of the economy on "the general character" of politics and culture. He never stipulated that every element of the superstructure is determined by material production. Nor did he say that the economic base determines the superstructure over the heads of the social actors. Human mediation, conscious or unconscious, is always presupposed. He was also careful to point out that on identical economic base that could be infinite superstructural variations due to geographical and racial peculiarities and the impact of alien cultures.<sup>21</sup>

2. However, the claim that economic life is primordial whereas every other mode of human activity is derivative can in no way be substantiated. It is, in fact, the Achilles heel in the Marxian conception of history and has ever since been a source of embarrassment to critical Marxists. Even Engels has to come out with a - though half - hearted - reaction. The attempt to *derive* the superstructure from the structure of material production is doomed to fail. For there is no element of economic life that does not already bear the stamp of a definite culture and consciousness. The choice of the product, the manner in which production is carried out, the subjective needs production seeks to satisfy, all are determined by culture. If so, how are we to explain Marx's overriding concern to derive all social reality from the economic base? I suggest the reason is to be found in the spell the Hegelian dialectic of the Logic had over him. In his Logic Hegel tries to derive a universe of ever more complex concepts from the simplest concept of 'being'.

3. This brings us to the dialectical procedure of Marx. In his writings one can discern two different approaches. The first is the one just mentioned. According to it, A begets its anti-

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21. See no. 10 above.



thesis B, and the ensuing opposition between A and B results in the synthesis C. To use this model to understand social reality is, in my view, an exercise in futility. It makes no sense, for instance, to take productive forces as thesis and the relations of production as anti-thesis and then look for a synthesis somewhere. There is, however, another approach in Marx (which can be traced to the *Phenomenology of Hegel*) which does start not with single terms but with polar relations. In this perspective, the three stages in the development of any polar relation would be characterised consecutively, by equilibrium, disequilibrium (contradiction), and equilibrium restored on a higher level. Supposing 'p' represents productive forces and 'r' relations of production, their dialectical development may be schematised as follows: pr(thesis), pxr(antithesis), PR (synthesis), the capitals indicating a qualitative leap. Here the question of deriving 'r' from 'p' does not arise. It seems to me this approach is better suited to the analysis of historical processes.

4. Now to come back to the materialist conception of history, the question must be squarely faced whether it is not necessary to accord greater autonomy to politics and culture than Marx does. Are not political, ethical, aesthetic, and religious dimensions of life primordial and not derivative at least in their essential dynamism? To recognize the legitimate autonomy of these dimensions is not to deny the role of the economy as the most important determinant of social and cultural life. But that role must itself be seen as already conditioned by political and cultural factors. The extent and manner in which any one sector of societal life determines any other at any given period of history must be empirically verified and not deduced from *a priori* conceptions. This would, of course, mean devaluing the architectural model of base and superstructure in favour of an organic model of society. In fact, Marx made use of the organic model in analysing developed capitalism.<sup>22</sup> The procedure could be extended to the study of society as a whole without in any way sacrificing the importance of the economic factor.

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22. *Grundrisse*, P. 278.

# Through History to Hermeneutics: a New Perspective in Theology

Man finds himself thrown into history without having asked for it and without a real clue to its understanding. He finds himself living in an infinitesimal but concrete segment of history, struggling, hoping and deciding in that situation. Every fiber of his being is intimately joined to history, to the civilization which nourishes and gives shape to his personal life. He sees that he is the result of a collective process of humanization in which he is only a participant. But within the hidden depths of his finiteness, there is an openness, a freedom and a challenge that summons him to make himself and his world in history. In short, man is a temporal, historical being achieving in and through time the making of himself. As a historical being, man can acquire the meaning of his existence only by partaking within a collective history of man. He can fully realize himself only if he possesses a coherent view of the world and of himself through the meaning of history. In his self-conscious existence man, therefore, tries to understand himself reflecting on the phenomenon of history – the mysterious stream that carries him so irresistibly.

In the light of the growing awareness of the historical dimension of man and its impacts on human thought, we would like to propose that theologizing today should take that into account and proceed in the direction of hermeneutics.

## I. History and Meaning

### A. Meaning of History

To understand the meaning of history, one has to take the totality of everything that is happening, has happened and will happen. It is not easy for anyone to have an overall view

of the drama which is being acted out in which his part lasts only for a brief moment but which absorbs his whole being. Whether the ancient and oriental cyclical view or the Judeo-Christian linear view of history<sup>1</sup> is held, one can in general say that history is the framework of reality where the meaning of human existence is raised. It is the powerful framework which supports one's life with meaning, the framework of events on the basis of which one lives a meaningful life. History is "meaningful events that explain each succeeding era in the total course of human events".<sup>2</sup> Indeed the occurrence of something in history does not become an historical fact until it becomes clear what that meant for the humans. This subjective dimension is an important aspect of history. In other terms, history is man's subjective intuition into objects which exist by virtue of their subjectivity, their meaning for man. "Historical subjectivity is the personal passion for a life of meaning. Historical objectivity is the trace of meaning left by other subjects. Where the constancy of the historical object merges with the intentionality of the historical subject, history is formed."<sup>3</sup> History objectively viewed, then, is the accumulation of meaningful residue left behind in the world.

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1. The ancient and oriental view of history is cyclical. (Cf. *The Idea of History in the Near East*, ed. R. C. Dentan, New Haven, 1955). Whether the Greeks had a cyclical conception of history is debated by G. Delling (Cf. *Das Zeitverständnis des neuen Testaments*, Gütersloh 1940) and James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, Naperville, Ill., 1962, pp. 57ff). The Christian criticism of cyclical theory that it leads man to despair and meaninglessness is today refuted. Far from leading man to despair, the cyclical view of history has the ability to give rebirth and thus has served man to give meaning and save man (Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, New York, 1959).

Judeo-Christian view of history is linear which has a beginning (creation), a centre (Jesus Christ) and an end (parousia) (Cf. J. M. Conolly, *Human History and the Word of God*, New York, 1965).

2. J. M. Conolly, *Op. cit.*, p. xv

3. C. Michalson, *The Rationality of Faith*. (London, 1953), p. 61

## B. Historical Understanding

Historical understanding is a process which takes place in the human horizon of inter-subjectivity. It is concerned with the subject trying to understand the meaning of his existence in history. It is 'an empirical manifestation of that 'original projection', that fundamental desire by which the human person incarnates itself and seeks to realize itself".<sup>4</sup> Knowledge is acquired here by the choice of the questions posed, which in turn is dependant on the conception, judgement and personality of the subject.<sup>5</sup> History is also subject to the free exercise of man's liberty. It is formed by the free exercise of decision which men take and still have to take in the future. My decision taken today makes a real but infinitesimal change on the curve of history. We are actors as well as spectators in history. This makes historical understanding not a simple mirroring of a past event but an active participation in it. "The mimesis of history, however, is not a reconstruction of reality but a dramatic personal participation in reality...History, however, requires participation as a basis of understanding."<sup>6</sup> This brings in the two conditions necessary for the possibility of historical understanding, viz., 1. The subjective dimension of constructing a meaningful world on the basis of a world of meaning. 2. The inter-subjectivity of historical being which leaves behind the traces of its life as a map for future life. Therefore, the criteria needed to see if the insights given by the historical process is authentic or not depends on the inherent authenticity which is not only in the fact that an event had occurred, was observed and recorded but also on the historical refinement of a people in recollecting the event in the terms which give it its original meaningfulness. So the understanding of the historical events is not grasped by mere eye-witnesses, but by historians who by

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4. H. I. Marrou, "From the Logic of History to an Ethic for Historian", in *Cross Currents*, xi n. 1 (1961), p. 68

5. Id., "History and the Historians are Inseparable", in *God History and Historians* ed. C. T. McIntyre (New Yoak, 1977) p. 399

6. C. Michalson, *Op' cit.*, p. 89



acts of interpretations penetrate beneath what human eyes behold to the underlying meaning. That is why history is characterized as a "continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past", projectable to the future.<sup>7</sup>

### C. Features of Historical Understanding

In historical understanding one is dealing with unclosed events where the encounter and resolution become parts of the event<sup>8</sup>. One cannot have absolute certainty of anything historical as if there were some criteria outside history to determine its truth. One has therefore to come to a decision and to consent to a belief that this moment of interpretation is the moment of clarity. Taking this decision without the objective certitude is his risk. It would involve a betrayal of history, if one refuses to take such risks. In historical understanding there are no ultimates, or there ought not to be. If there is any, it too would be a betrayal of history. It would constitute an indifference on the instructive heritage of the past, dogmatic restraint on the present and a foreclosure on the future. In history more than any other area ambivalence and ambiguity threaten our meagre human knowledge. Ambivalence is the law of history. There is a hidden as well as manifesting character in the historical understanding. There is a rational and an irrational in it. "History taken in its deepest analysis is a mystery, in the sense that we can never hope to acquire more

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7. The quotation in the sentence is from E. H. Carr. *What is History?* (New York, 1962), p.35. We add to the definition of Carr, also the notion of future found in M. Heidegger. According to Heidegger, "History as happening is an acting and being acted upon which pass through the *present*, which are determined from out of the future, and which take over the past." (Cf. M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim, London, 1959, p. 44)

8. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, (Tübingen, 1960), p. 94

than any external, limited knowledge of it, owing to technical and gnoseological as well as ontological reasons".<sup>9</sup> In spite of this sinister features of historical understanding, there is a rationality and an aim for history<sup>10</sup> which involves a belief in the meaning of history. "Faith in meaning, but in a meaning hidden from history, is thus both the courage to believe in a profound significance of the most tragic history (and therefore a feeling of confidence and resignation in the very heart of conflict) and a certain rejection of system and fanaticism, a sense of *the open*".<sup>11</sup>

## II. Hermeneutics

The above reflections on the historicity of man, the meaning of history and the historical understanding and its features bring us to the very heart of the problem of the theory of knowledge in general. From the point of view of the extreme complexity of the structure of history and the historicity of man, the knowledge that is being attained by man is no more so objectivistic as traditional epistemology claimed.

### A. Traditional Epistemology

A common view of epistemology in the philosophy of the ancient and medieval period down to our own day is "...to regard knowledge as apprehension of truth, its principal criterion as rational certainty and the relation involved in it as one between an objective reality on the one hand and a conforming experience on the other".<sup>12</sup> Here, knowledge consists in the mind's grasp of the truth which exists 'already out there now'. The in-

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9. Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, (New York, 1969), p. 56. (Cf. also his *De la Connaissance Historique*, Paris, 1966)

10. The great contemporary marxist. R. Garaudy says that the meaning of history is to set man free (Cf. *Le Communisme et la Morale*, Paris, 1960, p. 71)

11. P. Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (Evanston, 1965), p. 96

12. T. E. Hill, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (New York, 1961), p. 2

telleet therefore constructs theories, models or ways of representing things. The subject is here haunted by the search for certitude or for a foundation as it is uncertain whether its constructions are real or not. Such a view of knowledge implies that knowledge is a collection of accurate representations made possible by mental processes and that these representations must have a foundation in something that we are compelled to assent to. Even in the various theories of knowledge in the recent Analytical philosophy, there is an underlying assumption that such a foundation exists and that every theory or reality could be commensurable with that foundation.<sup>13</sup> Our analysis of the meaning of history, the historicity of man and the historical understanding compels us to abandon the search for this foundation and commensurability and with it to dispense with this view of traditional epistemology.

## B. Notion of Hermeneutics

In the place of the traditional epistemology, there arises hermeneutics.<sup>14</sup> Hermeneutics begins with a historical consciousness. By historical consciousness is meant not merely historical change and variability but man's conscious awareness of this fact and of its extent. So historical consciousness could be understood as the 'historical sense' needed to realize that a reality must be interpreted in its historical understanding. But in its deeper and more radical sense it is "... the recognition of the need for the finite, historical inquirer to conduct a critique of his own possibilities of meaning and those of other cultures and epochs".<sup>15</sup> Historical consciousness could thus be described as that "... orientation which understands human phenomena in terms of their

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13. For a critique of the various theories in the Analytical Philosophy Cf. R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford, 1980)

14. We do not call this a complete, systematic epistemology. It is still a task and a hope. We present here only some of the essential features of this epistemology and the direction this epistemology should take.

15. D. Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan* (New York, 1970), p. 139 footnote.

historical development and consequently understands historical development as totally or at least formally in the intentional order".<sup>16</sup> Hermeneutics begins with historical consciousness as an axis of reflection. What the historical consciousness stresses is the element of participation and distanciation on the part of the interpreter. Despite this dialectical tension in general, historical consciousness has an inherent element of *distance*.<sup>17</sup> In the words of Paul Ricoeur : "It is the nearness of the remote; or to say the same thing in other words, it is efficacy at a distance. There is thus a paradox of otherness, a tension between proximity and distance, which is essential to historical consciousness".<sup>18</sup> But although historical consciousness excludes an overall picture, it does not bring in relativism or enclose one in one particular view. Each situation has a horizon which can be contracted or enlarged and communication or understanding at a distance of two differently situated consciousness can be had by the fusion of their horizons, in a distant or a more wider horizon.<sup>19</sup> Thus according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, the text is not a depository of meaning, but a mediation of meaning. So the interpreter's task is not merely to figure out what the author of the text was trying to say, but to understand what the text actually says. Meaning mediated by the text actually exceeds the conscious intention of the author. The text itself in view of the language used and the images brought into play by it, is capable of revealing even deeper meanings than the author consciously understood or intended.<sup>20</sup>

Thus hermeneutics could be described as a framework that begins its operation with an historical consciousness of the interpreter and the interpreted, but which believes in the possibility of understanding of two different situations by transcending into a wider horizon. In hermeneutics 'justification' would be more a social & historical phenomena than a transaction between the knowing subject and the metaphysical reality. The dominating feature of hermeneutics is to stress the historical character of truth and the structure of man's understanding of truth. And in the structure of historical understanding the essential ingredient in the category of language is hermeneutics. In the Heideggerian view, hermeneutics is the medium in which events

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16. *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200

17. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. & trans. by J. B. Thompson (New York, 1981), p. 61

18. *Ibid.*

19. Gadamer, *Op. cit.* p. 289-90

20. *Ibid.*, p. 294



are able to occur with historical significance.<sup>21</sup> It is the bringing of the message, language as *presentation*, i. e., as making present. In traditional epistemology, language aims at *representational* exactitude. It aims at mirroring the reality. (Word is a mirror of a thing) In hermeneutics language is seen as "the universal medium in which understanding itself is accomplished".<sup>22</sup> It is not a depository of meaning. Language is "the reflection not of an objective environment, but of man's own life and action",<sup>23</sup> or as Von Humboldt says: "the word is not a copy of an object as such, but reflects the soul's image of the object".<sup>24</sup> This subjective dimension makes language not a simple mirroring of reality, but an active reconstruction of it. If language is thus medium, it confronts us not as a static univocal fixed object but as an indication of something which exceeds itself, and is capable of revealing even a wider horizon of meaning. Every experience as it precipitates and finds its articulation in language goes beyond the particular occasion with which it began. This is due to the very nature of language, which holds together "what is said" (*Das Gesagte*) with an infinite of "what is unsaid" (*Das Ungesagte*) in the unity of one meaning, and in this way "what is unsaid" and "what is to be said" are brought together into language.<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that a word or text can have any meaning which one chooses to assign to it, but rather that every word or text has a fullness of meaning which by its very nature can never be exhausted. "The peculiar objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*) of language is a consequence of its relationship to the world. What enters into language are states of affairs (*Sachverhältnisse*) i. e., an objective content (*Sache*) that is related in such and such ways (*sich-sound so verhält*)".<sup>26</sup> The text calls into play the consciousness of the interpreter, a consciousness which is historically structured and which therefore is not identical with that of any other interpreter.

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21. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford, 1973) p. 136. "... only in communicating and struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein."

22. Gadamer *Op. cit.*, p. 366

23. E. Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms I* (Chicago, 1953) trans. by R. Mannheim, p. 285

24. *Ibid.*, p. 284

25. Gadamer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 444-5

26. *Ibid.* p. 421,

Hence according to hermeneutics:

Different theories, explanations each get a portion of the truth, each illuminating in their way, even (and sometimes especially) when presented as a total theory of man; but no one or small number is adequate. We get a full view of man, a non-reductionist view, only by keeping all the theories in mind, only by seeing him in that multiple perspective. Even the reductionist theories play their role here, for their partial views of man also are a part of the basketful, making the multifariousness all the richer. That multifariousness is an important part of man's value, for *he* unifies these diverse and apparently incompatible theories in his person; the reductionist views themselves are part of the diversity that man unifies.<sup>27</sup>

In hermeneutics truth becomes more like a successful *conversation* in which two people try to come to a common understanding about some object which is of interest to both, and carrying on a successful conversation requires that one should submit to the objective content towards which the partners of the conversation are directed.<sup>28</sup> The partners in a conversation are not concerned with understanding each other but with understanding that about which they are talking. The conversation does not come to a closure when the first person has correctly understood what the other intended to say, but when both have understood the truth about the subject matter, which may or may not be identical to what either originally understood and/or expressed.<sup>29</sup> Thus in conversation occurs a fusion of horizons by means of a transcendence of partners to a new comprehensive horizon that includes the two originally different horizons. "Disagreements between disciplines and discourses are compromised or transcended in the course of conversation".<sup>30</sup> And the relations between various discourses are seen as "those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts. This hope is not a hope for the discovery of antecedently existing common ground, but simply hope for agreement, or, at least, exciting and fruitful disagreement".<sup>31</sup> Hermeneutics would show

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27. R. Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, (Cambridge, 1981) pp. 643-4

28. Gadamer, *op. cit.*, pp. 334ff

29. *Ibid.*, p. 360

30. R. Rorty, *Op. cit.*, p. 317

31. *Ibid.*, p. 318

that the whole truth is never attained, never fully commensurate with some 'objective reality out there'.

For epistemology to be rational is to find the proper set of terms into which all the contributions should be translated, if agreement is to become possible. For epistemology, conversation is implicit inquiry. For hermeneutics, inquiry is routine conversation. Epistemology views the participants as united in what Oakeshott calls an *universitas* – a group united by mutual interests in achieving a common end. Hermeneutics views them united in what he calls a *societas* – persons whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by a common ground.<sup>32</sup>

As Maurice Blondel said the traditional definition of truth as 'adequation of thing and the intellect' has to be translated into 'adequation of life and intellect' in hermeneutics. For things and hence our truth in knowing them, are only accessible to us in the way they present themselves in history – in the totality of the experience of life. Truth itself can only be defined within and with respect to the existential character of our being-in-the-world, given to us in the totality of our experience. Reflection on history and its subjective dimension often discloses truths sometimes very different from the metaphysical objectivistic conception of truth.<sup>33</sup> Thus with Richard Rorty we can conclude:

If we see knowing not as having an essence to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing *conversation* as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the objects of their inquiry to the relation between alternative standards of justification, and from there to the actual changes in those standards which make up intellectual history.<sup>34</sup>

### C. Characteristics of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics gives more attention to relationships than to immutable essences of reality and accepts a greater amount

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32 *Ibid*,

33. To these ideas here, I am indebted to the class notes of Prof. J. H. Walgrave O. P.

34. R. Rorty, *Op. cit.*, p. 389–90

of development and growth. It stresses the historical, the contingent, the personal and the existential. It is more concerned with man's striving for understanding, with the development in understanding demanded by the historical moment in which he lives. It sees man's existence as a vocation to find the meaning of his existence creatively in his life and experience, and not as a conforming to some already pre-existing pattern or plan. Thus it is responsive to the problems and complexity emerging in man's historical existence. It comes to grips with the objective reality of the historical situation, characterized by pluralism and a consciousness of man's freedom. It takes into consideration all the aspects of reality as it exists here and now. The concrete, the particular, the individual are important for telling us something about the reality itself. It highlights the historical and the cultural limitation of everything human, thus accentuating the need for growth and change. It proposes a much more inductive approach and hence its answers are often tentative and probing. Human experience play an important role in this method. It is open to the empirical, social and phenomenological data, which give useful perspectives concerning man and his historical existence. Whatever insight into reality is helpful to interpret life.

#### D. Implications of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics shows that man can never attain truth in its fullness. Human intellect can never hope to exhaust all its ramifications or grasp all its subtle intricacies. This means that man can reach only a level of knowledge where he attains a certain level of stability and invulnerability. As historical beings, we have no other choice than to accept and to submit to this '*faith primitif*' as to the truth available to us. For this brute, 'first given' from which all reflection starts and to which it has to refer in order to justify its own approximate correctness. Therefore, the certainty of human knowledge derives not from outside but from faith in man himself in history. This circularity in knowledge is due to the fact that we can only proceed from human knowledge as it *actually exists*, and not from some *a priori* category as Descartes did. We begin only with *our* reasoning, *human* reasoning, not with the abstract metaphysical reasoning. This means that we do not bring in an abstract metaphysical intellect to our research. We bring in an intellect filled with questions, methods and prejudices – the result of our psychological and cultural history. We have to be aware of this essentially historical grounding of our knowledge. This circularity of knowledge involves any aspect of human knowledge. Even the scientific knowledge is based on the faith in certain paradigms, models, and it is not as objective as it claimed. There is today a growing awareness of the subjective and social elements in Science. Science too speaks of commitments and community of paradigm-affirming



scientists.<sup>35</sup> "Conjecture, theoretical presuppositions, personal knowledge and the impact of a paradigm-affirming community are crucial elements in the formulation of scientific positions".<sup>36</sup>

Another important implication is the abandonment of the classicist method, which gives importance to an immutable and preconceived order. From the concept of an immutable order in the mind of God which has been implanted in the heart of man, the classicist method easily adopts an abstract, *a priori*, deductive and a historical procedure. "Absolute certitude is the goal of the classicist method, and as such certitude is achieved through the knowledge of abstract universals which are always true".<sup>37</sup> In a method of this sort where change was considered a decline, time could not be envisaged as the bearer of any positive value. This method is deductive: the conclusions are directly deduced from premises without investigating the historical perspective. Such a method could not cope with today's historical awareness of man. As Vatican II says: "... human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic evolutionary one".<sup>38</sup> Progress, change and growth mark the world and all reality. A more relevant method would be hermeneutics. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World employs such a method.<sup>39</sup>

### III. Hermeneutics in Theology

#### A. Historical Aspect of Christian Faith

Christian faith is a specific stance toward the world which the Christ event has made available. It is "an essentially historical reality embracing acts of faith as historical responses to God's self-manifestation in history".<sup>40</sup> It is an historical event in the person of Jesus witnessed by the apostles and the first Christians. Christianity is an historical faith, and Christian revelation from which all theological insight emanates is thus historical. In the Christ-event the tangled knots of history are unfolded. The

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35. Dean R. Fowler, "Einstein's Cosmic Religion", *Zygon*, vol. 14, n. 3 (1979), pp. 273-4

36. *Ibid.*, p. 273

37. C. Curran, *A New Look at Christian Morality*, (Notre Dame Indiana, 1968) p. 110

38. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 5 (*Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot.)

39. This constitution begins by scrutinizing the 'signs of the times' rather than with the universal notion of man, society, state, community and common good.

40. C. Michalson, *Op. cit.*, p. 108

peculiarity of the particular historical event of Jesus consists in the fact that the final is already present and the future and the final of each person depends on his present stance towards Jesus. The Christ-event opens up in this way inchoatively the last stage of the universal historical process..

## B. Theology of History

"History for the Christian is the interworld of meaning constituted by events which embrace God's word to man and man's obedient response'.<sup>41</sup> History is thus charged with a positive value for the Christian. In the Christian concept, history is the medium for the realization of the *oikonomia* of salvation. It is the *kairos* to fulfil our task and to shape our destiny. But history is not to be understood as the field of finitude which encloses within itself an 'immanence' to which one could and indeed would have to oppose a 'transcendence'. Thus it is not correct to assert that history reveals God, rather history is constituted by the active presence of God, and so we can say God reveals himself in history and through history and thus joins himself to the finite.<sup>42</sup> Thus a theology of history does not mean the identification of God with the process of history itself. The meaning of Christ-event impinges on the universal history.

As Pannenberg says:

The very historicity of all that is real means rather that the power working in events in every moment separates what is actual (as the finite) from itself, casts it off from itself, in that it passes on to the bringing forth of new, hitherto not present, events. Thus transcendence of God is not to be understood as a lifeless beyondness but as a living, ever new carrying out of his freedom, and thus as the making possible of future, life, new events in the world.<sup>43</sup>

Elsewhere Pannenberg writes:

History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions and answers are meaningful only within the framework of the history that God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation – the history

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41. *Ibid.*, p. 105

42. W. Pannenberg, "Offenbarung als Geschichte" *Kerygma und Dogma* V, (1956), p. 218

43. *Id.*, "Response to the Discussion" in *Theology as History* Vol. III ed. by J. M. Robinson and Cobb Jr. (New York, 1967) p. 250

moving toward a future still hidden from the world but already revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

### C. Christian Faith and Hermeneutics

If God acts in history, he must be seen to act within the patterns that inhere in history. Being tied to history in this way, the truth of Christian faith is to be seen and tested within the broader framework of hermeneutics. Christian faith cannot retreat to some sheltered area where it would be immune from hermeneutics. Hermeneutics as we saw, stresses both the consideration of the historical aspect of faith as well as the creative and dynamic interpretation of it. By interpreting the text as a medium that allows for the ongoing translation, hermeneutics provides the Christian faith with a dynamism and growth and relevance for modern man. This method at the same time provides the possibility of grasping the same truth and affirming the same truth as was grasped and affirmed at an earlier period, through interpretation. But any interpretation is interpretation by particular men in particular cultural milieu. The apostles and the first Christians interpreted the Christ-event from a certain specific viewpoint and also qualified and particularized by the different milieus in which they had been formed. We know that our predecessors have found truth through it and in it. We therefore faithfully scrutinize, question and search to see what we in our turn shall be taught. "From every point of view, we are children of the critical habit... It is impossible for us to believe without interpreting".<sup>45</sup> The language of the New Testament owes something to Jewish apocalypticism, to rabbinical thought, to Hellenic noetics. We cannot therefore appropriate this to ourselves without interpreting it. But we must affirm that the writers of the Bible are bearing witness in their various ways to the truth of which we also have some glimpses. If religious meaning is actualized in multifarious ways and at varying depths throughout the Christian history as the faith-structured consciousness of the believer dialogues with the revealing God through the mediation of the inspired text, then it is available to all believers in varying degrees of fullness. We know as they know (by faith) that this truth is truth and therefore we confidently interrogate their witness, so that we in our turn may receive our understanding and be able to bear our witness. So in interpreting Christian faith, we must envisage it from the point of view of its having meaning for all men, that it gives answer to the question of meaning of human existence. This fundamental attitude that the text evokes meaning is necessary

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44. Id., *Basic Questions in Theology* Vol. I (London, 1967) p. 15

45. P. Ricoeur, *Finité et Culpabilité* II (Paris, 1960) pp. 326-7

for any understanding whatever of the revelation content. This attitude or trust must be present despite the relative uncertainty of our probable, historical knowledge of the Christ-event. Only in such a tentative and provisional manner that knowledge is possible of that final reality which took place in history. Although we hope for an ever more accurate understanding of the past as we labour for it in research and discussion, we realize that we shall never fully appropriate any past reality in its totality and in its own terms. No insight will perfectly exhaust the data's intelligibility most especially if the data are God's self-communication in revelation. The only meaningful questions we can ask the past are those which are somehow relevant to our own needs and interests and those needs and interests vary with different individuals, generations and cultures.

#### D. Role of Hermeneutics

"A Theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of religion in that matrix".<sup>46</sup> So theology must reflect on the Christ-event in the light of concrete historical situation and must be developed in and out of the *sitz-im-Leben* of each age and culture. Hence theology must make use of the hermeneutical method. It must search through the thick and shadowy jungle of history to unfold and develop the meaning of Christ-event from the sources. "The newest pages of our theology are often very ancient pages which have been neglected and forgotten for a long time and have been found in their original freshness and lasting value only after long and arduous search".<sup>47</sup> But theology must not remain with this, it must show the relevancy of the Christ-event by interpreting and translating into modern man's specificities, symbols, language and experience. It must relate the given and originating expression of the apostolic community to the present day situation. A message moulded in another age and culture no longer means the same thing. As Karl Rahner puts it "... the real understanding of what is revealed and its existential appropriation by men is wholly dependent on the transformation of the propositions of faith, as they were originally heard, into propositions which relate what is heard to the historical situation of the men who hear".<sup>48</sup> This is because of the historical and hermeneutical character of the Christ-event, which cannot remain at the level of representational language. Theology has to try to restore the fecundity of the Christ-event and its expression in the first apostolic community which got

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46. B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, (London, 1973), p. xi

47. H. I. Marrou, *Time and Timeliness*, (New York, 1969) p. 10

48. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I. (London, 1961) p. 47



crystallized in doctrines very rich in content and which inspired them and at the same time try to re-think and re-formulate it within each age and culture. This does not mean placing a relative value on the Christ-event. "God does not simply address man, mankind in the abstract, but speaks to men who are making history, men in the concrete - man in biblical and in patristic times, medieval man, modern man and man today".<sup>49</sup> But it does not mean a break with the stream of Christian patrimony or a reversal of the past. In authentic reform or re-interpretation there is the need of a creativity which involves both utilization and rejection of the past according to an inherent authenticity which constitute the original Christian idea. The historical character of interpretation makes it to "think of its own historicness at the same time... so that the reality of history is exhibited in the process of understanding itself".<sup>50</sup> Though the horizon of the interpreter and of the text are different in the beginning, in the process of interpretation, the interpreter's horizon, not being fixed, is capable of going beyond and as he tries to understand his horizon is widened in such a way that he can appropriate the initially strange text with its horizon into the expanded horizon and thus forming a new horizon, a single horizon which comprehends everything which includes historical consciousness.<sup>51</sup> This is a creative act where he has to formulate a wide comprehensive horizon which synthesizes both the horizon of the text with its complex riches and the horizon of the modern world. Theology thus becomes ever-renewed, meaningful to the present day man and becomes a re-interpretation of the will and the way of the one Christ in dialogue with the new thought forms and cultural patterns. Theologizing thus becomes a dynamic, continuous process.

Thus in different cultures, philosophical schools and thought patterns, different aspects and emphases may emerge which may show the brilliance of the truth of the original event, which should not be consigned to the one-sidedness of a single theology but should be given full scope for refraction and dispersion by a variety of theologies developed in various cultures, philosophies and experiences. This pluralism in theology should be seen as the leaven of Christian faith which leavens various minds and cultures. It should be seen as the enrichment of Christian faith. But sometimes there will be doctrinal or theological earthquakes when such freedom is given. This should not be taken as disturbing or as scandalous. Purity of faith is more in danger when we do not translate and re-interpret into the actual situations

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49. E. Schillebeeckx, "The Bible and Theology", in *Revelation and Theology* (London, 1967), p. 199

50. Gadamer, *Op. cit.*, p. 283

51. *Ibid*, p. 288

the content of faith. "Purity is attained through the authentic witness of Christian belief, not through attempting to shelter the formulation of the Gospel message from the strife of human discourse".<sup>52</sup> Years ago Cardinal Newman wrote: "... Whatever the risks of corruption from intercourse with the world around us, such a risk must be encountered if a great idea is duly to be understood, and much more if it is to be fully exhibited".<sup>53</sup> This is the natural consequence of hermeneutics, which does not give complete objective certitude of anything. As we try to penetrate the historical event of Christ through the historico-hermeneutical method, the less we shall suppose that we yet 'possess' the whole of truth and more profound shall be our intellectual humility. We will have to divest the concept of 'authenticity' of a rigidly objective character; our consciousness must be purged of its classicism. We shall have to be satisfied with provisionality and precariousness. But even in such provisionality and precariousness of theological knowledge, the central message of the Christ-event must be affirmed, namely, that the final truth and ultimate life have appeared in the midst of the finiteness of historical life.<sup>54</sup> By reflection on its own particular limits in a given period, which means reflection on its finiteness, right theological knowledge is drawn into the mystery of its object. "Unity of truth is a timeless task only because it is at first an eschatological hope".<sup>55</sup>

Theological pluralism has important consequences in such areas of Christian life as inculturation and function of magisterium in the process of theologizing. When we become aware of the extent of hellenization of Christian faith in the early centuries, through hermeneutics, it would not be difficult for us to see the need of inculturation. As Vatican II says: "The particular traditions together with the endowment of each family of peoples will be illumined by the light of the Gospel and taken up into Catholic unity".<sup>56</sup> Each culture must bring its own values to Christianity and at the same time inculturate Christianity to its own particular forms and peculiarities. Should the Christian faith not be thoroughly developed with the help of a Vedanta Philosophy?

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52. N. Lash, "Dogmas and Doctrinal Progress", in *Doctrinal Development and Christian Unity*, ed. N. Lash (London, 1967) p. 32

53. Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1960) p. 55

54. W. Pannenberg, "Response to the Discussion" *art. cit.*, p. 276

55. P. Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (Evanston, 1965) p. xv

56. Decree on Missions, n. 22 (*Documents of Vatican II* ed; Abbott)



As to the function of magisterium with respect to theologizing, hermeneutics would demand from the official magisterium a detachment from a monolythic theology. The Church should free herself from any particular theology and embrace a 'Catholic' or universal theology. She will then have to train and develop a consciousness in all her members to see the various particular theologies as expressions of the one Christian faith. She will have to show the convergence of all of them without destroying the beauty of their variety. Rather than exercising the magisterial function in a negative way by applying the censorship sword on all the attempts of particular theologies and theologians, it should more positively allow a rightful freedom for trying new paths or for correcting old ones, thus enriching theology by incorporating what various theologies developed from various cultures, schools and philosophies of different parts of the world, have to say. This freedom is of vital necessity for real theologizing.

Arduous as it is, in evolving such an open and vigorous theological enterprise, hermeneutics which takes into account the interpretation of the living Jesus of history reached through the New Testament witnesses and emerging out of the Old Testament tradition and through the lives of all Christians who have recognized Jesus as Lord to the contemporary community of faith, but also extending to the horizon of the eschatological future with its openness, would play a relevant and significant role.

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